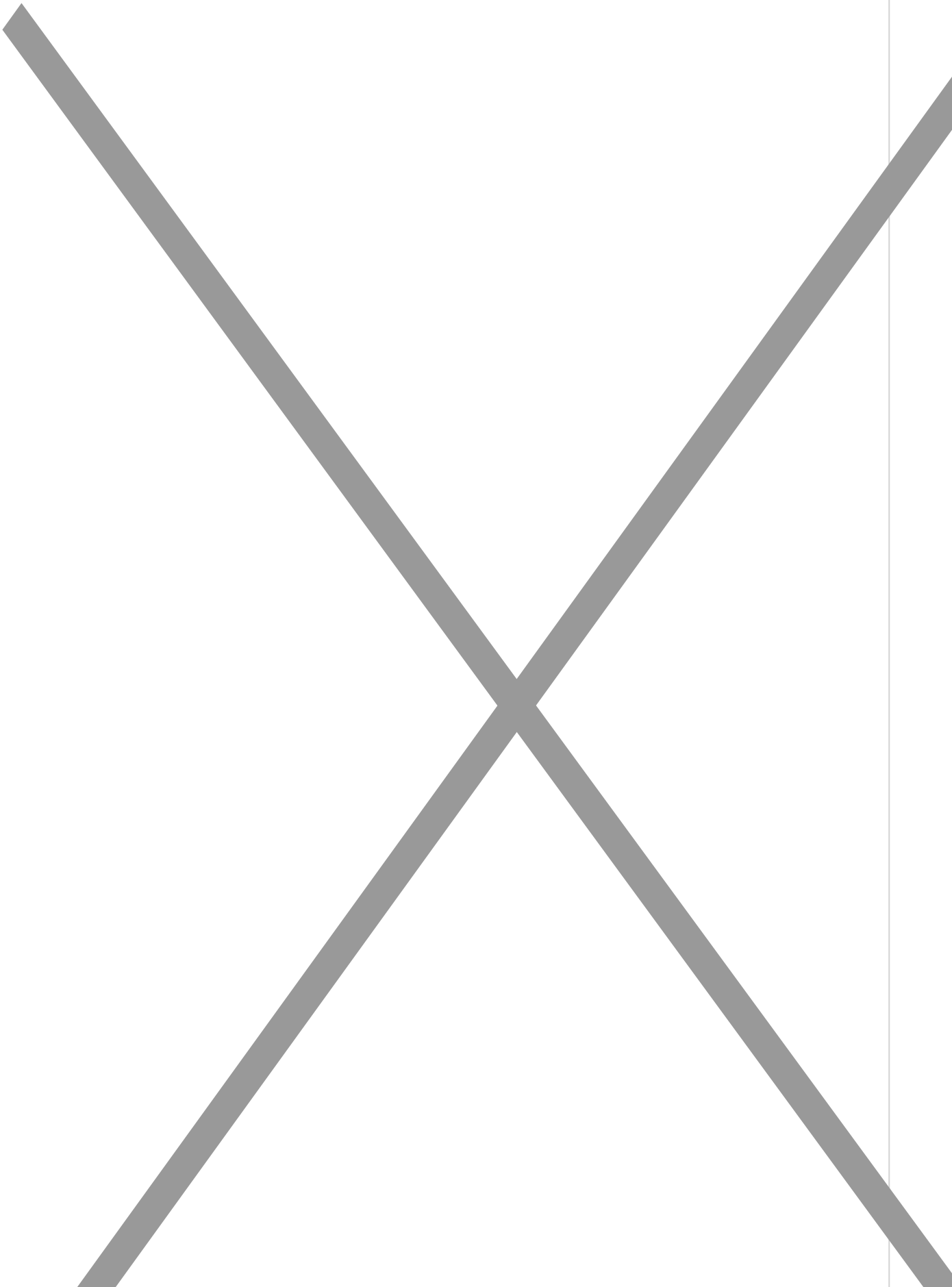


*Columbia University protester
Mahmoud Khalil challenges
arrest in U.S. immigration court*

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New York, May 23 (RHC)-- Mahmoud Khalil, a pro-Palestine protest leader targeted for deportation by the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, has sought to have the case against him thrown out in a consequential immigration hearing.

Khalil's lawyers were set to present evidence they say shows "egregious government misconduct" surrounding his March 8th arrest during Thursday's hearing in Louisiana.

"When there are egregious violations, the case should be thrown out, and that's what we've asked the immigration judge to do," Mark Van Der Hout, a lawyer representing Khalil, told reporters the night before the proceedings. The violations in question, Van Der Hout said, include the lack of a warrant at the time of the arrest and claims that Khalil proved to be a flight risk.

The hearing could be the most consequential turn yet in a series of cases in which US students have challenged being targeted by the Trump administration for their pro-Palestine advocacy or statements. It comes after three other students – Rumeysa Ozturk, Mohsen Mahdawi, and Badar Khan Suri – successfully challenged their detentions.

Ozturk, Mahdawi, and Khan Suri have since been ordered released on bail as their parallel challenges in federal court and their deportation cases in immigration court proceed. Lawyers for the students say their rights, including freedom of speech, have been violated by the Trump administration.

Despite Khalil also challenging his arrest in a federal case in New Jersey, a judge there has yet to make a ruling on whether he should be released. He has remained in detention in Louisiana.

Khalil's lawyers have accused the Trump administration of trying to slow roll his federal challenge to his arrest and detention, while fast-tracking the immigration proceedings. Judges in immigration courts, which fall under the executive branch, are typically viewed as less independent than life-tenured federal district judges.

"The bigger picture is that the government would like to slow down Mahmoud's habeas corpus case in federal court before an independent judge who has life tenure," Ramzi Kassem, a lawyer with the City University of New York's Creating Law Enforcement Accountability and Responsibility (CLEAR) project, told reporters.

"And they'd like to accelerate as much as possible these immigration proceedings, as they have so far, in front of a government employee who is subject to government pressure," he said.

Immigration Judge Jamee Comans had previously sided with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's claim that Khalil is deportable under an obscure provision of the Immigration and Nationality Act because his presence in the US poses "adverse foreign policy consequences".

Rubio has broadly portrayed Khalil's involvement in pro-Palestine protests at Columbia University as "anti-Semitic", but has not provided any further evidence to the court supporting the claim. Khalil and his legal team have firmly denied that his advocacy contained any anti-Jewish sentiment, and no evidence of such conduct has emerged.

Warrant-less arrest

Thursday's hearing will not hinge on the government's motivation for targeting Khalil, but will instead focus on procedural missteps by immigration agents. Those agents had initially claimed that they had a warrant to detain Khalil when they confronted him in the lobby of his Manhattan apartment building. They later admitted they did not have a warrant, but arrested Khalil because they said his actions and statements

indicated he was a flight risk.

Surveillance footage of the encounter contradicts that statement, Khalil's lawyers maintain. "We filed, over the last probably 48 hours, new evidence, including a video surveillance from Columbia that we got through a subpoena that clearly shows there was no attempt to flee whatsoever," Van Der Hout said.

Lawyers for Khalil are also separately arguing that he is eligible for asylum. They say the unfounded claims made by the Trump administration that Khalil is a " Hamas supporter " would put him at risk if he were to be deported to his birthplace of Syria, or to Algeria, where he has citizenship.

Ahead of the hearing, officials from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) denied a meeting between Khalil, his wife, Noor Abdalla, and their son, who was born while Khalil remained in detention.

Bodies of Palestinians, who were killed in Israeli attacks, are received by their relatives after funeral procedures at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, Gaza.

Israel orders 14 Gaza neighborhoods to evacuate amid intensified genocide

Gaza City, May 22 (RHC)-- The Israeli military has issued forced expulsion orders for residents of large areas of northern Gaza, as the regime intensifies its deadly air and artillery strikes across the besieged territory.

The Israeli occupation army on Thursday issued evacuation orders for residents of 14 neighborhoods in Northern Gaza, warning them of imminent bombings and destruction. An army spokesperson warned that the areas were now "considered dangerous combat zones," as the Israeli army is set to "significantly expand" its offensive in the areas.

Local Palestinian media reports recently said that the number of Palestinians who were forced to move from the north of the Gaza Strip to its southern part had exceeded 400,000.

Israel has meanwhile kept up its bombardment, with Gaza's civil defense agency reporting dozens of people had been killed in Israeli attacks on Thursday.

Since dawn, at least 52 Palestinians have been killed, pushing the daily toll to 107. Also, Israeli tanks targeted the medical supply warehouse of Al-Awda Hospital in the north. Gaza's health ministry said Thursday that 107 bodies were brought to hospitals in the last 24 hours, while 247 people were injured.

"Many victims are still trapped under the rubble and on the roads as rescuers are unable to reach them," it added.

Gaza's health ministry said on Thursday that at least 3,613 people have been killed since Israel resumed strikes on March 18.

The Israeli prime minister and internationally wanted war criminal Benjamin Netanyahu reaffirmed that his military aimed to bring the entire besieged territory under its control.

Netanyahu sets displacement of Palestinians as 'condition' to end Gaza war

Netanyahu, in a televised speech on Wednesday night, announced that implementing a US plan to displace Palestinians from Gaza is a "clear condition" for lifting the siege of the strip. "Gaza is totally disarmed, and we carry out the Trump plan. A plan that is so correct and so revolutionary," Netanyahu said

This came after Trump doubled down on his scheme to ethnically cleanse Gaza of Palestinians during his recent visit to some Arab states of the Persian Gulf region, insisting that the besieged strip be turned into a "freedom zone."

"Gaza has been a territory of death and destruction for many years," Trump said. "I have concepts for Gaza that I think are very good – make it a freedom zone. Let the United States get involved and make it just a freedom zone."

Meanwhile, the UN has confirmed that Israel is still blocking food from entering the blockaded region, with only five trucks of aid reaching Gaza by Tuesday afternoon, two of which were reportedly carrying shrouds instead of food and medicine.

Despite Israeli assurances that humanitarian aid would reach Palestinians, Gaza's Government Media Office earlier confirmed that the Israeli army has continued to block all aid from reaching the starving population in Gaza for 81 consecutive days.

UN agencies have said that the amount of aid entering Gaza falls far short of what is required to ease the crisis.

Palestinians have been scrambling for basic supplies, with Israel's blockade leading to critical food and medicine shortages. Umm Talal al-Masri, 53, a displaced Palestinian in Gaza City, described the situation as "unbearable." "No one is distributing anything to us. Everyone is waiting for aid, but we haven't received anything," she said. "We barely manage to prepare one meal a day."

The Palestinian resistance movement Hamas said the "fascist occupying regime attempts to mislead the world public opinion by falsely claiming to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza."

"It continues to use this deceptive propaganda as a cover to manage one of the most horrific crimes of starvation and genocide known in modern times," Hamas said in a recent statement.

Israel has faced mounting international pressure, including from its closest allies, to halt its expanded offensive and allow aid into Gaza. European Union foreign ministers have already agreed to review the bloc's cooperation accord with Israel.

Sweden said it would press the 27-nation bloc to impose sanctions on Israeli ministers, while Britain suspended free-trade negotiations with Israel and summoned the Israeli ambassador.

At least 29 children have died in recent days due to starvation in Gaza, said Palestinian health officials, as the humanitarian crisis deepens under Israel's ongoing blockade and bombardment.

"In the last couple of days, we lost 29 children," Palestinian health minister Majed Abu Ramadan told reporters on Thursday, describing the deaths as "starvation-related."

UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Tom Fletcher on Tuesday warned that as many as 14,000 babies could lose their lives in Gaza within 48 hours if the siege of the Palestinian territory continues.

With American support, the Israeli genocide has so far killed over 53,760 Palestinians and injured almost 122,200 others. Most of the victims have been women and children.



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