

SCOOP: Emails Show Mahmoud Khalil Asked Columbia for Protection a Day Before He Was Detained

"I haven't been able to sleep, fearing that ICE or a dangerous individual might come to my home. I urge you to intervene and provide the necessary protections to prevent further harm."



PREM THAKKER
MAR 10, 2025



411



38



119

Share



Mahmoud Khalil speaks to members of the media about the Revolt for Rafah encampment at Columbia University on June 1, 2024. Photo by Jeenah Moon/Reuters

Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian who helped lead negotiations between Columbia University and student protesters, had appealed to the school for protection from harassment and possibly Immigrations and Customs Enforcement agents *one day* before the **Trump administration detained him** on Saturday, emails obtained by **Zeteo** show.

The most recent among the leaked messages was an email Khalil, a green card holder, sent to Columbia interim president Katrina Armstrong on March 7. "Since yesterday, I have been subjected to a vicious, coordinated, and dehumanizing doxxing campaign led by Columbia affiliates Shai Davidai and David Lederer who, among others, have labeled me a security threat and called for my deportation," he began.

"Their attacks have incited a wave of hate, including calls for my deportation and death threats. I have outlined the wider context below, yet Columbia has not provided any meaningful support or resources in response to this escalating threat," he added.

"I haven't been able to sleep, fearing that ICE or a dangerous individual might come to my home. I urgently need legal support, and I urge you to intervene and provide the necessary protections to prevent further harm."

Type your email...

The message was especially notable given several reports of ICE being on campus throughout the week *and* Columbia's own guidance published about "potential visits to campus" by ICE. In the memo, the school said staff "should not interfere" in "exigent circumstances" where ICE agents are on university buildings or people without a warrant.

Columbia University and Lederer did not immediately respond to **Zeteo** comment.

Davidai, who had been **suspended** from campus last year over allegations he harassed university staff, denied collaborating with the Trump administration. Khalil deported. "Let me be absolutely clear: I have never had a direct contact with the administration. Even if I did, I would never use such influence to target anyone. This is not who I am or what I stand for," Davidai told **Zeteo**. "Like many of Khalil's repeated legal violations and demanded accountability. But as I always remind my students, just because one event follows another doesn't mean it caused it."

In online posts, Davidai had **called** Khalil a "terrorist supporter" and **suggested** he should be deported, tagging Secretary of State Marco Rubio.


Khalil's March 7 email came after an earlier Jan. 31 email he sent, in which he urged the school "to take immediate action to protect international students at Columbia facing severe and pervasive doxing, discriminatory harassment, and very possibly deportation in retaliation for the lawful exercising of their rights to freedom of speech, expression, and association..."

Khalil cited a **threatening** post by the pro-Israel organization **Betar** in January. In the post, the group wrote that he said, "Zionists don't deserve to live" – a statement Khalil "unequivocally" denied making in his email to university officials. Betar also wrote that ICE "is aware of his home address and whereabouts" and that they "have provided all his information to multiple contacts."

"He's on our deport list!" Betar added.

Type your email...

Citing the Betar post, Khalil asked Armstrong in his email: "With the stakes being so high, I ask you, as representatives of Columbia University's administration – how will you protect international students from doxing and from deportation? How will you protect these students' rights to free speech, expression, and association – rights provided for in the U.S. Constitution and Columbia's Code of Conduct – and stop the suppression and now potential criminalization of that speech and expression?"



Discover more from Zeteo
Zeteo is a new media organization that seeks to ask questions that really matter, while always prioritizing truth. Founded by Mehdi Hasan, Zeteo is currently on a mission to reach over 371,000 subscribers.

Enter your email...

By subscribing, I agree to Substack's [Terms of Use](#) and its [Information Collection Notice](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).

Already have an account? [Sign in](#)

Students' futures, their livelihoods, and now, without exaggerating, their lives are at risk."

Targeted Removal Before Arrest

On Thursday, March 6, Khalil emailed Gerald Lewis, the vice president of Columbia Public Safety, and cc'd Armstrong regarding the deactivation of his university ID. Khalil wrote that during a campus protest, he was approached by public safety staff who informed him his ID had been deactivated due to not being registered for classes this semester.

"I am a recent alumnus, having graduated in December 2024, with my degree set to be conferred in May. By now, I believe you've confirmed that I entered the campus like any other Columbia affiliate, swiping my ID and showing it to security," Khalil wrote.

"I questioned why I was being singled out, as I am aware of other Columbia affiliates who were in similar situations and were not approached, despite being in close proximity to me at the time," noting that the staff who approached were "well aware that I am a Palestinian national, as we have previously communicated and worked together to ensure safe campus protests."

"However, when I asked for clarification on how I was identified and why I was the only individual approached, they refused to provide any explanation," Khalil wrote, questioning why he was the only individual targeted and who issued the instructions for the staff to approach and remove him from campus. Khalil wrote that the lack of a clear justification raised concerns for targeted discrimination.

"For over a year, I have been collaborative with your office and other university offices to ensure all students are safe and that the university operates smoothly so I was really shocked to be treated this way. If I'm unwelcome on Columbia campus, please let me know through the right channels."

Trump: More Arrests to Come

For more than 24 hours after his detainment, Khalil's whereabouts were unclear. Per the ICE detainee tracker, he is now held in an ICE detention facility in Louisiana (just months ago, rights groups published a [report](#) on facilities in Louisiana entitled "Inside the Black Hole: Systemic Human Rights Abuses Against Immigrants Detained & Disappeared in Louisiana").

On Monday, a federal judge temporarily blocked the deportation of Khalil until at least Wednesday while he reviewed a petition that challenges the legality of Khalil's detention.

The Trump administration has scrambled to justify Khalil's detention – but has yet to say explicitly what, if anything, Khalil has been charged with. First, the Department of Homeland Security referred **Zeteo** to the White House, which did not respond to a request for comment. Later, DHS spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin confirmed in a statement that ICE detained Khalil "in support of President Trump's executive orders

prohibiting anti-Semitism.” Without providing evidence, McLaughlin claimed Khalil “led activities aligned to Hamas.”

Type your email...	Subscribe
--------------------	-----------

A State Department spokesperson initially told **Zeteo** they cannot comment on individual visa cases, but “in general, the department has broad authority to revoke visas ... under the Immigration and Nationality Act,” and that the department “exercise[s] that authority when information comes to light at any time indicating that a visa holder may be inadmissible to the United States or otherwise ineligible for a visa.”

But then, Rubio issued a curt statement that appeared to be trying to reconcile the confusion of how the State Department could even go after someone’s green card – especially after the arresting agents didn’t even know Khalil had one. “We will be revoking the visas and/or green cards of Hamas supporters in America so they can be deported,” Rubio wrote.

Finally, on Monday, President Donald Trump celebrated the arrest of Mahmoud Khalil, calling him, without providing evidence, “a Radical Foreign Pro-Hamas Student.”

“This is the first arrest of many to come,” Trump added.

*If you are already a paid subscriber to **Zeteo** but would like to increase your support for our accountability journalism, please do consider a **donation**, too.*

Editor’s note: This story has been updated with additional details and Davidai’s comment.

Subscribe to Zeteo

Tens of thousands of paid subscribers

Zeteo is a new media organization that seeks to answer the questions that really matter, while always striving for the truth. Founded by Mehdi Hasan, Zeteo is a movement for media accountability, unfiltered news and bold opinions.

Type your email...	Subscribe
--------------------	-----------

By subscribing, I agree to Substack’s [Terms of Use](#), and acknowledge its [Information Collection Notice](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).



411 Likes · 119 Restacks

← Previous

Next →

Discussion about this post

Comments	Restacks
----------	----------