

# What are the beliefs of Mahmoud Khalil's activist group CUAD? - analysis

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With the Saturday arrest of Columbia University Apartheid Divest [senior activist Mahmoud Khalil](#), the organization that has been involved in a series of confrontations with New York City academic institutions has been thrust back into the spotlight.

The issue of law enforcement action against the group's leadership cannot be separated from the actions and objectives of CUAD, which perceives itself as a revolutionary force working toward the destruction of

the United States and Israel.

The means to achieve this are not just through vandalism and [civil unrest](#), which CUAD directly employs, as the group also supports terrorism at home and in the Middle East, praising the October 7 massacre as the pinnacle of revolutionary action.

CUAD, a coalition of far-left and anti-Israel student activist organizations, led many of the post-October 7 protest actions at Columbia University.

The flagship Columbia encampment established in April inspired a global campaign emulating the occupation of campus spaces. The Columbia encampment project culminated in the occupation of Hamilton Hall, with the activists renaming the conquered facility "Hind's Hall."

In the short term, the protests sought to pressure New York academic institutions to disclose all investments and cut any financial and academic ties with Israel, its institutions, or those in relationship with them.

Pro-Palestinian student protesters who had been arrested for occupying and barricading a building at Columbia University exit following a hearing, where criminal charges against them had been dropped, at the Manhattan Criminal Courthouse in New York City, U.S., June 20, 2024. (credit: REUTERS/BRENDAN MCDERMID)

Yet the revolutionary ideology that motivates CUAD seeks more than these immediate objectives, in the same way that new demands have arisen by activist groups once their calls for a ceasefire were met.

The group sees the United States as an empire, with their fight within “the belly of the beast” inextricably connected to the fight of Hamas and other terrorist organizations in the Levant.

CUAD, like most anti-Israel organizations, sees the entirety of Israel as an illegitimate project, not limiting their designs to the Green Line. In an October Instagram post, it described 76 years of "Nakba" and Israeli state illegitimacy, further explaining in an October 17 Substack article commemorating the October 7 massacre that it would "not stop demonstrating until Zionism ends."

"Colonial projects all die, and Zionism will not be saved," reads the article.

The so-called liberation sought by these activists is a global revolution, highlighted by their calls to restore the US to "Turtle Island" in the same fashion as they propose Israel become "Palestine." An encampment banner shown in a June 1 CUAD Instagram post called for liberation "From Turtle Island to Palestine."

## **'We recognize that we must work hard to weaken US imperialism'**

In an August 16 Substack article connecting the theories of controversial post-colonial political philosopher Frantz Fanon to practice, CUAD members wrote, "As students living in the US, we recognize that we must work hard to weaken US imperialism."

CUAD repeatedly describes both Israel and the US as part of the same imperial system, sharing a February 2024 social media post in which Aaron Bushnell's self-immolation was described as being against the "US-Israeli state."

In a November 21 Substack article describing how a CUAD reading group studies the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)'s Strategy for the Liberation of Palestine, one student supposedly remarked, "The struggle in Palestine is my fight as a Black person in America."

"The movement for Palestinian liberation is not isolated; it is part of the

global anti-imperialist struggle," the CUAD writer contextualized. "The interconnectedness of struggles against imperialism is critical – revolution sparks revolution."

CUAD believes that Israel cannot survive without US support and concluded in a November 7 article that by "working against US imperialism at home, alongside the people of Harlem and with an ear for their demands, we believe that we can facilitate its fall. Therefore, we cannot separate the struggle in support of a free Palestine with the struggle against US imperialism."

The means acceptable to achieve the destruction of Israel and the United States included armed violence and terrorism.

In an October 8 Instagram post in which the CUAD leadership apologized to member Kymani James for coming out against his January statements proclaiming "Zionists don't deserve to live" and suggesting he was inclined to kill them because of their supposedly evil ideology, CUAD reiterated their support for the tool of political violence.

"We support liberation by any means necessary, including armed resistance," said CUAD.

"In the face of violence from the oppressor equipped with the most lethal military force on the planet, where you've exhausted all peaceful means of resolution, violence is the only path forward."

The Substack articles posted by CUAD are rife with battlefield reports describing how Hamas and Hezbollah are fighting "heroically" against the IDF. In an August 16 article, CUAD assured a reader that Hamas and the Houthis were progressive forces because of the support of the people and their roles in weakening US imperialism. The rockets fired by the Houthis and other terrorist organizations against Israeli civilian centers are cast in a glorified tone.

"For over a year, the resistance to this genocidal occupation has been a banner of hope for many since Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, with the axis of resistance remaining strong," CUAD wrote in the same newsletter.

## **CUAD praised Sinwar, October 7 Massacre**

In a fawning November 7 Substack tribute, it described Hamas leader [Yahya Sinwar](#) as a "brave man" who will live in the hearts of many. CUAD praised the October 7 Massacre as "Sinwar's crowning achievement" because the "Al-Aqsa Flood was the very essence of what it is to resist 'with what we have.'"

"The act of Palestinian resistance on October 7, known as the Al-Aqsa Flood, breached Israeli security and made significant military advances. [This is] a day that will go down in history."

Besides Sinwar, the arch-terrorists of Hamas and Hezbollah are the icons of CUAD, with the group mourning the death of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh.

CUAD documents regularly quote PFLP founder George Habash and deceased Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah, such as in a November 21 Substack post in which they praised the concept of "martyrdom" as something only seen as negative by those who had "separated resistance from the path to liberation."

PFLP spokesperson Ghassan Kanafani is a favorite of the group, with his writings featured in events like those depicted in a November 6 Instagram post. Local terrorists are also praised, with convicted murderer and Black Liberation Army member Assata Shakur's poetry chanted by students in a September 28 social media video.

Terrorism as an option of action is not just a theoretical exercise for activists in the US, in CUAD's belief system.

In a June 20 Instagram post, CUAD came out in support of Casey Goonan, who allegedly engaged in an arson spree of a University of California, Berkeley Police Department vehicle, a construction site, a brush area near a library, and another building. CUAD viewed it as a "rational action of targeting state infrastructure" in response to US support for Israel's military operations in Gaza.

"CUAD stands in full support of Casey Goonan and all of our comrades who have bravely undertaken the call to escalate for Palestine," said the coalition.

"The fires on UC campuses have been in direct response to the university's violent police repression of their own students. The spark ignited on US campuses during the intifada of the last few months cannot be quelled, and further repression will only continue to transform these sparks into flames."

CUAD denounced those who attacked Goonan's tactics as ineffective or unwise, saying that they had clear "ethical content."

The review of PFLP literature to understand terrorism was not an isolated incident, with Substack posts detailing their study of terrorist materials, including a November article about how PFLP and Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine operations led a student to say they "highlighted the importance of celebrating resistance as a source of inspiration."

The October 17 article described how they read Mao Zedong's On Guerrilla Warfare to analyze and glean "lessons" from the October 7 massacre. On February 8, CUAD drew outrage for holding an event at the People's Forum to learn "the methods employed to sustain the revolution" from the First Intifada.

Most recently, before Khalil's arrest, dozens of keffiyeh-clad activists

entered Barnard's Milbank Hall, leaving the hallways graffitied after the occupation ended. The group demanded amnesty for disciplined students and negotiations for their main demands, threatening to continue the occupation and disruption until the administration caved.

Khalil's arrest is not a matter of free speech; it is a matter of how the US will continue to respond to the campus production of a fifth column that seeks violent revolution within its territory.