

The chilling Effect
By Michel Shehadeh

When federal agents, backed by local police, barged into my home and arrested me at gunpoint, I thought they didn't know what they were doing. I presumed they had gotten the wrong address. Today after twelve years of fighting the government attempts to deport me, it is clear to me they knew exactly what they were doing. It was all parts of a larger plan.

The government wanted to establish a legal precedent against immigrants whose political views deemed undesirable. They thought that if they accuse Palestinians Last Wednesday, February 24; the Supreme Court handed the government what it was seeking. The Court has decided to preclude federal courts from jurisdiction over constitutional challenges in a deportation setting. The government can deport immigrants for their political opinions.

I immigrated to the United States in 1975 to escape persecution. I came to this country to speak and live freely. I made America my home because I wanted to raise a family in a secure and safe environment. We have always been a law-abiding family. However, when I spoke out in favor of Palestinian self-determination and independence I found my home and family threatened and my freedom taken from me. I was deemed dangerous by the government when I advocated an Independence Day for the Palestinians similar to the fourth-of-July we Americans celebrate. [As hard as I am trying to refer to myself and family as "we Americans", the Supreme Court decision in the back of my mind keeps pushing back "You foreigners"]

We spend large sums of money on the Middle East. We invest lots of time and energy in that region. We send our daughters and sons there in harm's way. We need to know all the political perspectives pertaining to that region. Open debate is fundamental to our system of government. We need the debate on the ME to independently make up our own minds based on a balanced knowledge of the situation, and not only on what the government tells us. How many times has the government lied to the people, Watergate, Iran/Contragate, and all the other gates that fill volumes? The government wanted to stifle immigrants from speaking their opinions; the Supreme Court has given them the means to do so.

My views in support of Palestinian independence, once unpopular, are now mainstream. The PLO, once considered a terrorist organization, is now a partner of our administration in the pursuit for peace in the ME. This is what I've always advocated, why then; does the government want to deport me?

After examining 10,000 pages of evidence, the lower courts saw this case for WHAT IT is, a blatant attack on FREE SPEECH, and ruled against the government. Judge Stephen Wilson of the Los Angeles district court said that this case "borders on the outrageous. William Webster, head of the FBI at the time of the arrest, testified before Congress, that

we had never engaged in any criminal conduct. It is time for the justice department to drop this case before it does more damage.

If the injustice of Justice Scalia's opinion is allowed to stand, It will be devastating to our democracy. He wrote: "The Executive should not have to disclose its 'real' reasons for deeming nationals of a particular country a special threat – or indeed for simply wishing to antagonize a particular foreign country by focusing on that country's nationals..." What this in essence means is that the internment of Japanese American was lawful for "simply wishing to antagonize a foreign country", and that it could be repeated against the Chinese, Iraqis, Serbians, Libyans, Sudanese and the Palestinians.

This is not far fetched. A plan was discovered, just after our arrest, entitled: "Alien Terrorist and undesirables: A Contingency Plan." The plan discloses that the government established a mass interment camp reminiscent of the Japanese American internment, for Arab and other Middle Eastern immigrants. The camp site was prepared in Oakdale, Louisiana, complete with fences, cots and tents enough for five thousand detainees. Are Arab Americans the next internment story in our history?

It is McCarthyism all over again. Only this time not communists but immigrants are being targeted. The chilling effect of the Supreme Court's decision would render millions of lawful residents speechless. As an immigrant I am being stripped of my right to speak freely, as an American I am being stripped of my right to hear other immigrants speak freely. It is a losing proposition for all of us.