



[State Department Memo Exposes Absence of Evidence in College Student Detainment Cases](#)

New reports earlier this week uncovered how an internal State Department memo had found no evidence supporting the Trump administration's alleged rationale for abducting and pushing to deport Tufts University student Rumeysa Ozturk, yet days later, immigration officials unlawfully detained her nevertheless. The memo's findings solidify what rights advocates have been seeking to highlight all along – that the unfounded detainment of students like Ozturk is simply a violation of free speech protections, and is not based on any actual documentation of wrongdoing or illegal activity. The complete lack of a shred of evidence is why in the cases such as that of Ozturk, Mahmoud Khalil, and other recent student detainments, the Trump administration has failed to present a single criminal charge. Instead, it is glaringly obvious that these individuals are being targeted solely for their activism in support of Palestinian human rights and social justice. Ozturk herself was detained and had her visa revoked for merely co-writing an op-ed last year in the school's newspaper urging Tufts University to divest from companies with ties to Israel – something that the higher education institution's president noted was well within the bounds of its code of conduct and has therefore prompted him and the university to come to her defense.

The Trump administration has revoked the visas of hundreds of international students and detained at least a dozen on college campuses across the United States, in what rights groups have denounced as a disturbing assault on the civil liberties and free speech protections of legal immigrants. As officials with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) have pointed out, speaking out against human rights violations or being critical of a university for its policies and ties to certain entities is neither illegal nor a valid reason for detention. What is wrong, on the other hand, is the Trump administration's use of immigration officers to try and silence people who hold political opinions that they disagree with. The administration's actions have sparked outrage and criticism, particularly as videos of some of the arrests have gone viral, depicting plain-clothes officers detaining individuals without warning or the levying of official criminal charges. This is alarming due to the fact that legal and immigration experts have affirmed visa-holding students possess the same First Amendment right to free speech as U.S. citizens, and thus, forms of peaceful political or social expression should not warrant the potential of visa revocation and deportation. As a result, lawyers for Ozturk are understandably questioning the legality of her detention at an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in Louisiana, saying that the Trump administration's actions have violated constitutional free speech and due process rights.

Similarly to how recent developments have illustrated the absence of evidence in Ozturk's case, this can also be said about other high-profile college student detainments as well, like that of Mahmoud Khalil. When digging into the documentation submitted by the Trump administration in its effort to deport Khalil, media outlets found that the government is relying on unverified tabloid articles about him in some instances, and in others, their so-called claims are undoubtedly false since timelines laid out do not match. While Trump officials such as U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio have tried to characterize Khalil's actions as antisemitic, the detained student's attorneys have submitted evidence rebuking this, including first-hand accounts of him expressing that antisemitism has no place in the Gaza solidarity movement and that Jewish activists were an integral part of it. In spite of all of this, an immigration judge ruled late last week that Khalil is eligible to be deported from the United States. Following the ruling, Khalil's attorneys informed the judge of the intent to file an appeal, and the judge ordered the government

not to remove Khalil as the case challenging his arrest as unconstitutional plays out in federal court – the outcome of which could block the prospect of deportation.

Ozturk and Khalil are just two of a growing number of voices simply expressing concern with injustice against Palestinians that the current administration is attempting to silence. Badar Khan Suri – a scholar at Georgetown University – and most recently, Mohsen Mahdawi – a Columbia University student – have been taken into custody as well. Khan Suri's case has prompted more than 370 alumni of Georgetown University to join 65 current students there in signing a letter opposing immigration authorities' detention of him, while what unfolded with Mahdawi has elicited outrage as he was arrested earlier this week at a U.S. citizenship interview in Vermont. As in the cases of Ozturk and Khalil, the Trump administration has been heavily criticized for providing no evidence or legitimate explanations for its actions against Khan Suri and Mahdawi. Adding to the anger and confusion is the lack of clarity regarding how officials are choosing who to detain, other than [relying on](#) extremist groups like Betar to arbitrarily give at least 1,000 names to the administration. It has become clear that individuals who have voiced a certain viewpoint are being targeted without valid reason or due process, and the use of law enforcement entities to carry this out is alarming, as it resembles the actions of a repressive regime with no regard for the protection of freedoms and civil liberties. This combined with Trump's efforts to pull funding from various universities, whose campuses have long been viewed as major platforms for social, political, and cultural movements and activism, should trouble all who value American democratic ideals and principles.