EXHIBIT F

Democracy Dies in Darkness

EXCLUSIVE

No evidence linking Tufts student to antisemitism or terrorism, State Dept. office found

An internal memo, prepared days before Rumeysa Ozturk was detained by ICE agents, raises doubts about the Trump administration's claims that she supports Hamas.

Yesterday at 8:20 p.m. EDT



By John Hudson

Days before masked Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents detained Tufts University student Rumeysa Ozturk to deport her, the State Department determined that the Trump administration had not produced any evidence showing that she engaged in antisemitic activities or made public statements supporting a terrorist organization, as the government has alleged.

The finding, contained in a March memo that was described to The Washington Post, said Secretary of State Marco Rubio did not have sufficient grounds for revoking Ozturk's visa under an authority empowering the top U.S. diplomat to safeguard the foreign policy interests of the United States.

The memo, written by an office within the State Department, raises doubts about the public accusations made by the Trump administration as it has sought to justify Ozturk's deportation. The Department of Homeland Security has said Ozturk engaged in activities "in support of Hamas," a U.S.-designated terrorist organization, but neither that agency nor U.S. prosecutors have provided evidence for that claim.

The revocation of Ozturk's visa is part of an expanding crackdown on international students and scholars by the Trump administration including hundreds of visa revocation cases. She was taken into custody March 25.

Ozturk, a 30-year-old doctoral student from Turkey, was targeted by the government for co-writing an op-ed last year in the Tufts student newspaper criticizing the university's response to the Israel-Gaza war. A hearing in Ozturk's case is scheduled for Monday in federal court in Vermont. Her lawyers say her possible deportation would violate the United States' founding principles of freedom of speech.

When asked about the memo, the State Department said "we do not comment on ongoing or pending litigation."

DHS did not respond to a request for comment.

DHS originally recommended the revocation of Ozturk's visa under an authority in the Immigration and Nationality Act that allows for the deportation of a foreigner if the secretary of state has reasonable grounds to believe the person's presence or activities has "adverse policy consequence for the United States," according to a copy of a separate memo reviewed by The Post and sent by DHS to the State Department before her detention last month.

"OZTURK engaged in anti-Israel activism in the wake of the Hamas terrorist attacks on Israelis on October 7, 2023," says the memo, from senior DHS official Andre Watson to senior State Department official John Armstrong.

"Specifically," Watson's memo says, Ozturk "co-authored an Op-ed article" that "called for Tufts to 'disclose its investments and divest from companies with direct or indirect ties to Israel.'"

After receiving the recommendation from DHS, the State Department found that while Ozturk had protested Tufts' relationship with Israel, neither DHS nor ICE nor Homeland Security investigations produced any evidence showing that Ozturk has engaged in antisemitic activity or made public statements indicating support for a terrorist organization, according to U.S. government employees briefed on the State Department's memo.

The memo also said that a search of U.S. government databases on Ozturk did not produce any terrorism-related information about her.

As a result of the lack of evidence, the department said she could be deported using a different authority under the Immigration and Nationality Act that allows for the revocation of a visa at the secretary of state's discretion.

Legal analysts say a key difference between the two authorities at Rubio's disposal is that the original one "requires a rationale and explanation and evidence," said Soulmaz Taghavi, an immigration attorney. But the authority ultimately used for Ozturk's deportation does not.

"There's a chain of communication that gets passed along to the attorney general, but there isn't any requirement to justify or rationalize what exactly the removal" is based on, Taghavi said.

In a separate document dated March 21 and reviewed by The Post, the State Department informed DHS that the revocation of Ozturk's visa had been "approved" under the discretionary authority.

"Due to ongoing ICE operations security, this revocation will be silent; the Department of State will not notify the subject of the revocation," the memo says.

Video of Ozturk being grabbed off the streets of suburban Boston by plain-clothed agents drew international attention to her case and sparked widespread debate about suppression of speech by the Trump administration. At Tufts, Ozturk's arrest drew intense criticism, including from a pro-Israel group on campus and Tufts Republicans.

"We strongly oppose the content of the op-ed that Öztürk coauthored last year," read an op-ed by Tufts Friends of Israel, "... but restricting freedom of speech is flat-out undemocratic and un-American. Freedom of speech in a democracy is sacred. It ensures that dissent is heard and that people can express themselves — it is the best tool we have to fight tyranny. Right now, our freedom of speech is under attack."

When asked about revoking Ozturk's visa, Rubio has repeatedly suggested that her infractions go far beyond co-writing an opinion column in a student newspaper.

"I would caution you against solely going off of what the media has been able to identify," he told reporters on a flight back to the U.S. from his recent meetings in the Caribbean.

In another exchange with reporters, he said Ozturk's removal is "not just because you want to write op-eds but because you want to participate in movements that are involved in doing things like vandalizing universities, harassing students, taking over buildings, creating a ruckus."

There are no indications that Ozturk was a leader in last year's protests at Tufts.

Rubio has broadly justified his visa revocations by claiming that the students who have been targeted supported Hamas and promulgated antisemitism.

When asked about Rubio's justification given the State Department memo indicating a lack of evidence that Ozturk engaged in antisemitism, the State Department referred to a recent Rubio op-ed published by Fox News.

"Visiting America is not an entitlement," it says. "It is a privilege extended to those who respect our laws and values. And, as Secretary of State, I will never forget that."

In a recent sworn declaration submitted in her case, Ozturk said she did not know that the State Department had revoked her visa when she was apprehended.

She was on the phone with her mother when several men surrounded her on the sidewalk. After one of the men grabbed at her, she screamed.

"I didn't think that they were the police because I had never seen police approach and take someone away like this," Ozturk wrote in the declaration. "I thought this was a strange situation and was sure they were going to kill me."

Ozturk was handcuffed, then chained at the waist and put in ankle shackles, she wrote.

What readers are saying

The comments express strong criticism of the State Department's decision to revoke Rumeysa Ozturk's visa, highlighting concerns about freedom of speech and the perceived authoritarian actions of the Trump administration. Many commenters draw parallels to historical authoritarian... Show more

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