EXHIBIT H

U.S. Cites Mideast Peace Process to Justify Move to Deport Student

Mohsen Mahdawi, who led Columbia protests, engaged in activities that could threaten attempts to end the war in Gaza, a memo from Secretary of State Marco Rubio said.

Listen to this article · 5:19 min Learn more




By Hamed Aleaziz and Jonah E. Bromwich

April 15, 2025

The Trump administration is seeking to deport a Columbia student because his activities could "potentially undermine" the Middle East peace process, according to a memo from Secretary of State Marco Rubio that was reviewed by The New York Times.

The student, Mohsen Mahdawi, 34, is a legal permanent resident who has spent a decade in the United States. Until this week, he had been in hiding, for fear that the administration would seek to deport him after he led pro-Palestinian demonstrations at the school. But on Monday he showed up at an immigration services center in Vermont, expecting to take the test that would allow him to become a naturalized citizen.

Instead, he was detained by Department of Homeland Security agents, who relied on Mr. Rubio's memo as the justification for the arrest. Mr. Rubio cited the same law that has been used to justify the detention of Mr. Mahdawi's fellow Columbia protester, Mahmoud Khalil.

The law, which Mr. Khalil's lawyers have challenged in federal court, allows Mr. Rubio to initiate deportation proceedings against anyone whose presence in the United States can reasonably be considered to hurt American foreign policy goals.

Last week, an immigration judge found that Mr. Rubio's memo alone allowed the Trump administration to meet the burden of proof necessary for deporting Mr. Khalil, whom the secretary accused of undermining the fight against antisemitism. The judge's decision affirmed, for the time being, Mr. Rubio's power to pick and choose which noncitizens — even those with legal residency — can be deported.

Evidence submitted by the Department of Homeland Security and reviewed by The Times did not include any allegations of antisemitism against Mr. Khalil himself, apart from the flat declaration in Mr. Rubio's memo.

Mr. Khalil's detention created an uproar, and his lawyers had already begun to mount constitutional challenges on behalf of their client by March 15, when Mr. Rubio's memo concerning Mr. Mahdawi was issued.

Like Mr. Khalil, Mr. Mahdawi stands accused of undermining the U.S. foreign policy goal of halting antisemitism. But Mr. Rubio's memo concerning Mr. Mahdahwi is different in several respects and more specific.

The memo asserted, without elaboration, that protests of the type Mr. Mahdawi had led could undermine the Middle East peace process by reinforcing antisemitic sentiment in the region and around the world and ultimately threatening a U.S. foreign policy goal of resolving the Gaza conflict "peacefully."

It also said, without elaborating, that Mr. Mahdawi had "engaged in threatening rhetoric and intimidation of pro-Israeli bystanders" and that his actions had undermined efforts to protect Jewish students from violence.

A lawyer for Mr. Mahdawi, Luna Droubi, asked to comment on the assertions in the memo, said that they were "baseless claims made with no evidence."

"Mohsen in fact took the lead on bringing Palestinian and Israeli students together in pursuit of a just peace on campus and in the Middle East," she said. "Mohsen, like every other person in this country, is entitled to due process and protections under the First Amendment."

Mr. Rubio's memo asserts that it is an American foreign policy goal to peacefully resolve the Gaza conflict, and President Trump's administration has pushed for a deal to end Israel's war in Gaza. But at the same time, the president has also given Israel freedom to renew its war in the territory. Since negotiations between Israel and Hamas collapsed last month, Israel has undertaken a major bombing campaign.

Mr. Mahdawi has challenged his detention in Vermont federal court, where a judge has barred the administration from moving him out of the state or the country.

Mr. Mahdawi, who was born in a refugee camp in the West Bank in September 1990, has lived in the United States since 2014. He enrolled at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania in 2018 to study computer science before transferring three years later to Columbia, where he began to study philosophy.

In the fall of 2023, he became a leader of the student movement on campus, founding a Palestinian Student Union with Mr. Khalil.

That November, Mr. Mahdawi was one of the visible leaders of a walkout at the school. During that protest, according to The Columbia Spectator, he reacted strongly to an individual who shouted antisemitic and anti-Black statements. "Shame on you," he said, and later expressed gratitude to the "Jewish brothers and sisters who stand with us here today."

According to his lawyers, Mr. Mahdawi, a Buddhist, stepped back from the protests in the spring of last year. He expected to receive an undergraduate degree next month and to return to the school as a graduate student in the fall.

Representatives for the State Department declined to comment. A spokeswoman for the Department of Homeland Security referred questions to the State Department.

Sharon Otterman contributed reporting.

Hamed Aleaziz covers the Department of Homeland Security and immigration policy for The Times.

Jonah E. Bromwich covers criminal justice in the New York region for The Times. He is focused on political influence and its effect on the rule of law in the area's federal and state courts.