

NEW BILL WOULD GIVE MARCO RUBIO “THOUGHT POLICE” POWER TO REVOKE U.S. PASSPORTS

Rubio has already sought to punish immigrants for speech. New legislation might let him do it for U.S. citizens.

Matt Sledge

September 13 2025, 4:00 a.m.



Secretary of State Marco Rubio speaks at a press conference during the North Atlantic Treaty Organization summit in The Hague on June 25, 2025. Photo: John Thys/AFP via Getty Images

IN MARCH, Secretary of State Marco Rubio stripped Turkish doctoral student Rümeyza Öztürk of her visa based on what a court later found was nothing more than her **opinion piece** critical of Israel.

Now, a bill introduced by the chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee is ringing alarm bells for civil liberties advocates who say it would grant Rubio the power to revoke the passports of American citizens on similar grounds.

The provision, sponsored by Rep. Brian Mast, R-Fla., as part of a larger State Department reorganization, is **set for a hearing** Wednesday.

Mast's legislation says that it takes aim at "terrorists and traffickers," but critics say it could be used to deny American citizens the right to travel based solely on their speech. (The State Department said it doesn't comment on pending legislation.)

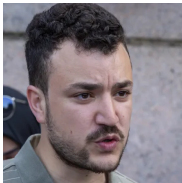
Seth Stern, the director of advocacy at Freedom of the Press Foundation, said the bill would open the door to "thought policing at the hands of one individual."

"Marco Rubio has claimed the power to designate people terrorist supporters based solely on what they think and say," Stern said, "even if what they say doesn't include a word about a terrorist organization or terrorism."

"Rubio has claimed the power to designate people terrorist supporters based solely on what they think."

Vague "Terrorist" Designations

Mast, for his part, has publicly voiced his support for “kicking terrorist sympathizers out of our country.” At the time, he was talking about deporting Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian green-card holder who the Trump administration detained and attempted to deport based on what critics of the move said were his pro-Palestine views.



Related

The Case Against Mahmoud Khalil Hinges on Vague “Antisemitism” Claim

Mast’s new bill claims to target a narrow set of people. One section grants the secretary of state the power to revoke or refuse to issue passports for people who have been convicted of – or merely charged with – material support for terrorism. (Mast’s office did not respond to a request for comment.)

Kia Hamadanchy, a senior policy counsel at the American Civil Liberties Union, said that language would accomplish little in practice, since terror convictions come with stiff prison sentences and pre-trial defendants are typically denied bail.

The other section sidesteps the legal process entirely. Rather, the secretary of state would be able to deny passports to people whom they determine “has knowingly aided, assisted, abetted, or otherwise provided material support to an organization the Secretary has designated as a foreign terrorist organization.”

The reference to “material support” disturbed advocates who have long warned that the government can misuse statutes criminalizing “material support” for terrorists – first passed after the 1995 Oklahoma City federal building bombing and toughened after the 9/11 attacks – to punish speech.

MOST READ



GOP Rep. Backtracks on Bill That Could Let Marco Rubio Revoke Passports From Israel Critics

Matt Sledge



Pentagon Barred Senior House Staffers From Briefing on Venezuela Boat Strike

Nick Turse



Google Secretly Handed ICE Data About Pro-Palestine Student Activist

Shawn Musgrave

Some of those fears have been borne out. The Supreme Court [ruled in 2010](#) that even offering advice about international law to designated terror groups could be classified as material support.

The government even deemed a woman who was kidnapped and forced to cook and clean for Salvadoran guerrillas a material supporter of terrorism, [in order to justify her deportation](#).

Since the October 7 Hamas attacks, pro-Israel lawmakers and activists have ratcheted up attempts to expand the scope and use of anti-terror laws.

The [Anti-Defamation League](#) and the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law [suggested in a letter](#) last year that Students for Justice in Palestine was providing “material support” for Hamas through its on-campus activism.



Related

Criticizing Israel? Nonprofit Media Could Lose Tax-Exempt Status Without Due Process

Lawmakers also tried to pass a “[nonprofit killer](#)” bill that would allow the treasury secretary to strip groups of their charitable status if they

are deemed a “terrorist-supporting organization.” The bill was beaten back by a coalition of nonprofit groups, most recently during the debate over the [so-called Big, Beautiful Bill](#).

Mast’s bill contains eerily similar language, Stern said.

“This is an angle that lawmakers on the right seem intent on pursuing – whether through last year’s nonprofit killer bill, or a bill like this,” Stern said.

The provision particularly threatens journalists, Stern said. He noted that Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., in November 2023 [demanded a Justice Department “national security investigation”](#) of The Associated Press, CNN, New York Times, and Reuters over freelance photographers’ images of the October 7 attacks.

Rubio also revoked Öztürk’s visa on what appears to be nothing more than an op-ed she wrote for the Tufts University student newspaper in 2024 – which [did not mention Hamas](#) – calling on the school to [divest from companies tied to Israel](#).

Since taking office, Rubio has also added groups to the State Department’s list of foreign terrorist organizations at a blistering pace, focusing largely on gangs and [drug cartels](#) that were previously the domain of the criminal legal system.

Free Speech Exception?

There is an ostensible safety valve in Mast’s bill. Citizens would be granted the right to appeal to Rubio within 60 days of their passports being denied or revoked.

That provided little comfort to the ACLU's Hamadanchy, who is helping rally opposition to the bill.

"Basically, you can go back to the secretary, who has already made this determination, and try to appeal. There's no standard set. There's nothing," he said.

Hamadanchy said the provision granting the secretary of state discretionary power over passports appeared to be an attempt to sidestep being forced to provide evidence of legal violations.

"I can't imagine that if somebody actually provided material support for terrorism there would be an instance where it wouldn't be prosecuted — it just doesn't make sense," he said.



[Read Our Complete Coverage](#)

Chilling Dissent

While the "nonprofit killer" bill drew only a smattering of opposition on the right from libertarian-minded conservatives such as Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., Stern said Republicans should be just as concerned about the potential infringement of civil liberties in the passport bill.

The law, he said, would also grant nearly unchecked power to a Democratic secretary, he said.

"Lately, it appears that the right is so convinced that it will never be out of power that the idea that one day the shoe might be on the other foot doesn't resonate," Stern said. "What is to stop a future Democratic administration from designating an anti-abortion activist, a supporter of