

# Thousands protest Trump administration's kidnapping of Tufts student Rumeysa Ozturk in Somerville, Massachusetts

Jacob Crosse  
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Wednesday night in Somerville, Massachusetts, several thousand people, including students, faculty and community members, rallied in defense of Tufts University Ph.D student Rumeysa Ozturk. The 30-year-old Fulbright scholar and graduate of Columbia University was kidnapped by six unidentified US immigration agents and disappeared into an unmarked SUV, shortly after 5:15 p.m. Tuesday evening.

Surveillance footage of the kidnapping showed the agents, all wearing masks to shield their faces below the eyes, ambushing Ozturk as she was walking on the sidewalk after she left her house to attend Iftar, the fast-breaking evening meal of Muslims during Ramadan.

Without identifying the agency they were with or what crimes Ozturk was alleged to have committed, the masked thugs grabbed her arms, twisted her wrists and grabbed the phone that was in her hand. Ozturk cried out, "You are hurting me!" as the agents continued to surround and eventually handcuff her.

A visibly distraught Ozturk is heard repeatedly telling the police, "Ok, I'm a student." As the agents handcuff her, one of them replied, "I understand it's scary. We are the police."

A resident filming the abduction yelled back in reply:

Well, you don't look like it! Why are you hiding your faces? Why are you hiding your faces?

The agents did not reply or remove their masks. Instead, they continued to surround Ozturk. As the masked thugs disappeared with Ozturk into the unmarked SUV, the bystander again asked:

Can we see some faces here? How do I know you are the police? Looks like bull\*\*\*\* to me.

The kidnapping of the unarmed student and the fascistic character of her detainment have provoked outrage in the

United States and internationally, especially in Turkey where all of Ozturk's family lives.

Immediately following the kidnapping of Ozturk, Mahsa Khanbabai, her lawyer, filed a habeas petition in a Massachusetts federal court to get the student out of detention. Khanbabai noted that no charges have been filed against her client and that Ozturk's F-1 student visa is still valid.

On Tuesday night, US District Court Judge Indira Talwani ordered the government to keep Ozturk within the state of Massachusetts and not remove her without giving the court prior notice. She also ordered the government to provide her an answer by Friday as to why Ozturk was detained in the first place.

Nearly 24 hours after Ozturk was disappeared by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), her lawyer Khanbabai still did not know where she was. The ICE locator did not show her location through Wednesday morning.

In a statement to the *Boston Globe* Wednesday afternoon, Khanbabai confirmed that Ozturk had been flown out of Massachusetts to a for-profit immigration detention facility in Louisiana operated by the GEO Group in apparent violation of Judge Talwani's order.

Khanbabai told the *Globe*:

I don't understand why it took the government nearly 24 hours to let me know her whereabouts. ... Why she was transferred to Louisiana despite the court's order is beyond me. Rumeysa should immediately be brought back to Massachusetts, released, and allowed to return to complete her Ph.D. program.

Ozturk has not been accused of a crime, and it does not appear she has previously been arrested in the United States. She has been targeted solely for her opposition to the genocide in Gaza.

At Wednesday's protest, Alex, a resident of Somerville, told the *World Socialist Web Site*:

They want to get us scared. ... And it's obviously having the opposite effect.

It's not antisemitic to be protesting genocide, obviously. But this is the scare tactic they're using.

Notably, her arrest comes just days after she was identified by the shadowy "Canary Mission," an Israeli-based operation that almost exclusively harasses and doxxes students and faculty who oppose the brutal oppression of the Palestinian people.

The organization has never disclosed its financial backers, but Reuters and *Jewish Forward*, citing a 2016 tax filing, noted the organization received \$100,000 from the Helen Diller Family Foundation, which Reuters describes as "a prominent Jewish American philanthropic organization." Reuters reported that the Diller Foundation gave "\$100,000 to the Central Fund of Israel earmarked 'Canary Mission for Megamot Shalom.'" The outlet noted that Megamot Shalom was founded in 2016 "to preserve and ensure the national strength and image of the State of Israel," according to documents from Israel's corporations registry.

The *Times of Israel* and other outlets have reported that under the guise of "defending Israel" and exposing "antisemitism," the far-right Canary Mission website began publishing dossiers in 2015 which have been used by the Israeli government to question or ban people attempting to enter the country.

The dossier of Ozturk recently posted on the site claims she engaged in "anti-Israel activism," an activity protected by the First Amendment regardless of immigration status. To support the claim of "anti-Israel" activism, the website hyperlinked an op-ed that Ozturk had co-authored with three other students last year for the school newspaper which called on Tufts University President Sunil Kumar to uphold resolutions passed by the Tufts Community Union Senate.

The resolutions passed by the student body called on Kumar to recognize the genocide in Gaza, divest from Israeli companies and stop selling products from Sabra because its co-owners, the Strauss Group, have provided material support for Israel's Golani Brigade. Any claim that the op-ed is "antisemitic" is pure fiction. The words "Zionist," "Jew" or "Jewish" do not even appear, while Israel is only mentioned four times.

So far, ICE and Department of Homeland Security officials have refused to detail any alleged crimes or specific activity Ozturk engaged in to warrant an immediate visa suspension and deportation.

In a statement posted on X Wednesday afternoon, Tricia McLaughlin, the assistant secretary of DHS, wrote:

Rumeysa Ozturk is a Turkish national & Tufts University graduate student, granted the privilege to be

in this country on a visa. DHS + ICE investigations found Ozturk engaged in activities in support of Hamas, a foreign terrorist organization that relishes the killing of Americans. A visa is a privilege not a right. Glorifying and supporting terrorists who kill Americans is grounds for visa issuance to be terminated. This is commonsense security.

Ozturk is one of several students who have been targeted by the Trump administration for deportation for exercising their First Amendment rights. On March 8, Mahmoud Khalil, a graduate student at Columbia University and legal resident, was kidnapped by plainclothes ICE agents in New York City and flown to a Louisiana immigration detention facility, where he remains imprisoned, away from his eight-and-a-half-month pregnant wife. Khalil has not been accused of a crime.

Yunseo Chung, a 21-year-old Columbia University student and legal resident of the United States, sued the Trump administration on Monday over its efforts to deport her to South Korea, a country she has not visited since she emigrated to America when she was seven years old. Chung was not a prominent anti-genocide protester during last year's campus encampments, but she was arrested on a misdemeanor charge by police earlier this month for participating in a non-violent pro-Palestinian protest at the main library at Barnard College.

The Trump administration is also currently trying to deport Cornell University graduate student Momodou Taal. Like the others, Taal is being targeted for protected political speech, namely his opposition to genocide, and for suing the Trump administration over two executive orders Trump signed earlier this year that have been used to justify the kidnapping of anyone deemed "anti-Israel."

*On Thursday March 27, the World Socialist Web Site will be hosting an online meeting featuring Taal, his attorney Eric Lee, WWSW International Editorial Board Chairman David North and Socialist Equality Party (US) National Secretary Joseph Kishore. Readers and defenders of democratic rights are encouraged to attend.*



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