



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on September 15, 2025

Bill Would Hand State Department Broad Authority to Strip U.S. Passports on “Terrorism” Grounds

The latest State Department Reauthorization Bill hides a clause with sweeping consequences. In just one sentence, it grants the department power to

Revoke passports to any individual who [has] been charged, convicted, or determined to have knowingly aided, assisted, abetted, or otherwise provided material support to a foreign terrorist organization.



AP Images
Marco Rubio

If [the bill](#) becomes law, that authority will land in the hands of Secretary of State Marco Rubio. For critics, the danger is obvious: passports could be canceled on nothing more than his “determination,” without trial, evidence, or conviction.

The authors, led by Rep. Brian Mast (R-Fla.), cast the broader bill as a bipartisan reassertion of American power across the globe. They stress that it marks the first full reauthorization of the State Department in more than two decades. Since the late 1990s, Congress has kept the department running through piecemeal extensions and budget riders. This time, lawmakers claim they are restoring Congress’ “full responsibility” by giving the agency a fresh, comprehensive mandate. China, Russia, Iran, Cuba, Venezuela — all are invoked as proof of why the State Department needs more muscle. Western Hemisphere Subcommittee Chairwoman Rep. Maria Elvira Salazar (R-Fla.) praised what she called the “united vision of Secretary Rubio, President Trump, and the Foreign Affairs Committee’s GOP strategy,” vowing to “crush tyranny” abroad.

The language is sweeping, the targets ever shifting. What emerges is a narrative of a worldwide battlefield, where “terrorism” means whatever Washington chooses it to mean. And while the rhetoric points outward, the subtext is clear: The same machinery is primed to turn inward, against citizens at home. That may include those who dissent from the very foreign entanglements Trump once vowed to end.

Legal Framework

The United States already has clear laws to deal with terrorism. [18 U.S.C. § 2339A](#) and [§ 2339B](#) make it a crime to provide material support to foreign terrorist organizations, carrying penalties of up to 20 years in prison. Anyone convicted under those statutes is removed from circulation and cannot travel abroad.

Judges also hold authority to restrict travel in pending cases. Under [18 U.S.C. § 3142](#), courts can require defendants to surrender their passports as a condition of release. And under [22 C.F.R. § 51.60](#),



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the State Department can deny or revoke passports for individuals facing arrest warrants or court orders, or proven threats to national security.

In other words, the legal framework already exists. If someone truly aids a terrorist group, they are charged, convicted, and locked away. If they are awaiting trial, judges can and do restrict their movements. The system already covers it.

What the new reauthorization bill adds is not security, but power. It apparently lets the secretary of state bypass the courts, bypass due process, and make his own determinations with no clear appeal process.

The difference is stark. Existing law ties passport restrictions to evidence and judicial oversight. The new clause ties them to politics, handing the secretary of state unilateral authority to decide who is a “terrorist supporter.” That shift turns a legal process into a political weapon.

Rubio’s Views

Rubio has already shown how expansively he interprets “terrorism.”

In March, he [vowed](#) on social media:

We will be revoking the visas and/or green cards of Hamas supporters in America so they can be deported.

His post came after the arrest of [Mahmoud Khalil](#), a Palestinian-born U.S. permanent resident. The authorities did not charge him with any crime. Instead, Rubio argued that Khalil’s “presence and activities” posed “serious adverse foreign policy consequences” and would “compromise a compelling U.S. foreign policy interest.”

That same month, the State Department [revoked](#) more than 300 visas, targeting foreign nationals accused of pro-Palestinian activism. Among them was Rumeysa Ozturk, a Turkish Fulbright scholar at Tufts University. Rubio pulled her visa after she co-authored an op-ed urging divestment from companies tied to Israel. A later review found no evidence she had ever expressed support for Hamas or any terrorist group.

Rubio also went after Palestinian leaders themselves. Ahead of the UN General Assembly in August, his department [revoked](#) visas for President Mahmoud Abbas and dozens of senior officials from the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

During Biden’s term, when administration staffers objected to military support for Israel’s assault on Gaza, Rubio [branded](#) them “Hamas supporters” that needed to be fired. In reality, their statement was a plea to [protect civilians](#).

Mast shares Rubio’s sentiment. A former Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldier, Mast [once declared](#) that even babies killed in Israeli airstrikes were “not innocent Palestinian civilians.” In March, [praising](#) Rubio’s attempts to deport Khalil even without a criminal charge, he demanded that “terrorist sympathizers” be “kicked out of the country.”

Politicizing “Terrorism”

Of course, groups like Hamas *are* terrorists — no serious person denies that. But in Washington, “terrorism” is anything but consistent. It is a label stretched to fit the politics of the moment.



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Take northern Syria. In July, the Trump administration [dropped](#) the “foreign terrorist organization” label from Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), once known as al-Nusrah Front. Its leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa — aka Abu Mohammad al-Jolani — used to have a \$10 million U.S. bounty on his head. The group’s tactics never changed. Only Washington’s agenda did.

History offers the same pattern. Palestinian militants are “terrorists.” The Contras in Nicaragua, the mujahideen in Afghanistan, the jihadists in Syria? Those were “our guys.”

At the same time, a quick invocation of the “terrorist threat” gives the president license to act without oversight. Just weeks ago, Trump ordered a strike on a Venezuelan-linked vessel in the Caribbean, killing 11 people. Officials called it a counternarcotics and counterterrorism mission, branding the crew part of the Tren de Aragua (TdA) gang. However, no evidence was given to Congress or the public.

Israel & Gaza

And then there is Israel, whose documented actions in Gaza meet the definition of “state terrorism” under international law: indiscriminate bombardment of civilian areas, forced displacement without safe passage, systematic destruction of hospitals and infrastructure, and the deliberate denial of food, water, and medicine. [Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention](#) prohibits collective punishment. [Protocol I](#) bans attacks on civilian populations. [The Rome Statute](#) defines starvation of civilians as a method of warfare as a war crime. Yet Washington overlooks these violations.

Americans are not blind to this. A recent *Times of Israel* poll [found](#) that most Americans, including MAGA-leaning voters, oppose Israeli annexation of the West Bank. Quinnipiac [reported](#) that 60 percent of registered voters oppose sending more military aid to Israel in its war on Gaza. (Even if most Americans approved of this, the fact remains that U.S. government involvement in the Middle East conflict — or any foreign dispute — is unconstitutional.)

Who’s a Terrorist?

Elastic definitions like “terrorism” have long been Washington’s most versatile weapon. Abroad, they excuse proxy wars, coups, and strikes on sovereign states. At home, the same logic is poised to turn inward, empowering federal officials to strip passports from citizens accused of “supporting a foreign terrorist organization” — a charge that requires no trial and no evidence, only a political determination.

That means anyone can become the target — minority communities, journalists, activists, even charities. The next administration could just as easily stretch the label to include gun owners, outspoken parents at school board meetings, or whichever faction falls out of favor. All while officials smile for the cameras beside foreign leaders with civilian blood on their hands — and funnel American money to them.

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