

12 hour interrogation at Tel Aviv Airport

The flight was from a London UK airport, to Tel Aviv Ben Gurion Airport. The flight left London at 10am and arrived in Tel Aviv local time of 4:40pm. I am a 20 year old student from London, of Palestinian descent, born in the UK with a British passport. This is my personal account of Israel's intimidation offensive, currently happening to thousands of people (mainly Palestinian or supportive of the Palestinian cause) trying to visit Israel and Palestine, at Israeli airports, borders and checkpoints. I am able to recall the exact times, as I kept track of it on my phone with evidence of everything stated below.

4:40pm - *All passengers of the flight left the aircraft and made their way to passport control, to have their passports checked, and go to arrivals. I approached the passport control booth and gave him my passport:*

Passport control worker: *Looks at my passport for around 5 minutes, without saying a word, typing things into his computer, checking every page of my passport, and repeatedly looking up at me and back to the passport*

What is your father's name?

Me: **I give them the name of my Palestinian father**

What is your Grandfathers name?

Me: **I give them the name of my Palestinian grandfather**

Passport control worker: Go to the waiting room at the back.

Me: Why? Is there a problem?

Passport control worker: Go to the waiting room now. DON'T MAKE ME ASK YOU AGAIN.

Me: **Making my way to the waiting room, it's a small closed off room opposite the passport control booth, the only people who were there, were visibly Muslim, and after me communicating with some, were also Palestinian, who told me that every time they arrive to Ben Gurion despite living in Israel and having Israeli citizenship, they are left waiting for up to 6 hours and then get their passport returned to them without any questions being asked, then leave the waiting room and head home.*

6:33pm - **I was asked to follow a security attendant to an interrogation room at the back.**

Security attendant: Why are you visiting Israel?

Me: To see family and friends who live here.

Security attendant: Which family and friends? Give me their full names, their addresses and their phone numbers.

Me: **I wrote down the details of friends and family of whom I would be staying with.**

Security attendant: What is your email? Phone number? Home phone number?

Me: **I wrote all my details down that he asked for.**

Security attendant: I see you have been to Israel many times before, what were you doing day to day on these trips?

Me: Seeing family and friends who live here.

I then wrote down day to day what I was doing on these trips before from memory. I then also wrote what I would be doing day to day on my trip this time round

Security attendant: You have ever entered the West Bank during these trips before?

Me: Yes as I have relatives who live there.

Security attendant: Ok go back to the waiting room.

Me: How long will this take? I have someone waiting for me

Security attendant: It will take longer when you don't do as I say

8:26pm - *At this point I had been waiting for nearly 4 hours, despite me asking security staff at interrogation rooms behind the waiting room several times, how much longer these checks would take as I had a friend waiting for me, they told me that they were doing "security checks" and these checks would take longer if I wasn't patient.*

At this point, a man who fit the description of a security guard dressed in normal clothes (not airport security uniform), as told to me by other people who have been interrogated by him for hours at Ben Gurion, approached me, and told me to follow him to an interrogation room. I will refer to him as interrogator number 1 and then the rest who interrogated me in numerical order. At this point I hadn't eaten or drunk anything since the first hour of my flight in the morning. I was extremely tired.

Interrogator 1/11: **Stares at me for minutes, as part of their intimidation offensive, and tells his counterpart, interrogator 2, to type something into the computer in Hebrew**

Why did you come to Israel?

Me: To see family and friends.

I1: For how long? Do you have a return ticket?

Me: **I show them my flight tickets, and my return ticket booked for the following week.**

I2: What is your home address, phone number and home phone number?

Me: **I then give my same details for the second time.**

I1: BDS, what do you know about it?

Me: Sorry, what?

I1: You are a part of it right?

Me: Sorry I don't know what you're talking about.

I1: When you lie to us, we know. We have the best intelligence in the world. So we suggest you tell us the truth if you want to enter our country.

Me: I am extremely tired, I haven't slept for 24 hours and I am just here to see family and friends, of whom I have given you all their details, I don't see the purpose of all this.

I1: So what do you do in London?

Me: I'm a student.

I1: What do you study?

Me: Economics.

I1: What do you do at university? Are you a part of any group or society?

Me: I have just joined in September, so no not really a part of anything yet.

I1: What about a maybe...Palestine society? Think about your answer.

Don't lie to us, we already know everything.

Me: I have to gone to a few events for many societies.

I1: Do you have Facebook?

Me: No.

I1: Really?

Or did you de activate it before boarding your flight this morning? Your behaviour and what you are telling us is the reason we will deport you, you are lying to us, your behaviour is suggesting you're a security threat and a threat to our country.

Me: Yes I de activated it, but because I have many relatives here, and I am only here for a week. I de activated it so I wouldn't have to meet everyone, as Facebook is how they all contact me.

I1: So if I were to go on to your Facebook, what would I find?

Me: Selfies probably. **Laughs**

I1: You think this is funny? **Speaks in Hebrew to I2 for a few minutes**

What do you think about Women's rights? And Syrian refugees?

(They were referring to topics I had made YouTube videos on...)

Me: Oh so you have seen my YouTube videos? What did you think?

They then typed something into the computer and changed the subject

I1: What are your parent's names?

Me: **I wrote down my parents names, on the piece of paper they supplied me.**

I1: What are their jobs?

Me: **I write down their professions. (I am keeping some personal details private in this account of what happened for safety and privacy reasons of myself and my family.)**

I1: How old are your parents? Where do they live? Especially your father, where is he now?

Me: UK.

I1: What is the address of where your parents work?

Me: I don't know sorry, somewhere in London.

I1: Can you write your parents phone numbers and emails down on the paper.

Then gets a laptop to Google the names of where my parents work

I1: Have you thought of joining ISIS or Daesh?

Me: No, never.

I1: Do you know anyone who has?

Me: No.

I1: What do you think of Hamas? And Hezbollah? You support them or what?

Me: No, I am not involved with politics.

I1: Do you go to protests?

Me: No not really

I1: Have you heard of Berlin?

Me: Yes, I haven't been to Germany.

I1: No not Germany, Berlin?

Me: I have no idea what you're talking about honestly no idea

**It then occurred to me after him repeating the name several times; he was referring to an area in the West Bank pronounced Bel'in, where there are popular weekly protests against the Israeli occupation and settlements by locals and foreign activists.*

*Throughout all of these questions, all staff treated me like a criminal, like I had done something wrong, constantly looking at me in a suspicious eye squinting manner, constantly looking at me up and down at attempts to try and intimidate me**

I1: Have you been to Syria or Iraq?

Me: No, never.

I1: Write down all the countries you have entered, when you were there and for how long.

Me: **I write down my travel history.**

I1: Tell me more about BDS

Me: I don't know much about it

I1: Do you know people who are? You know people who are activists?

Me: Not really no.

I1: If you don't help us, how can you expect us to help you and get you the visa you need to leave the airport and get on with your trip?

Me: What do you want from me? I'm sorry I don't understand

I1: Names. We want names of activists and people who support BDS, do you know Bahaa Milhelm?

Me: Sorry who?

I1: You know this is our job, we have to be here. You don't, you can easily leave if you just do as we tell you. So stop lying to us and give us names, it is very easy for us just to send you to a detention centre. Check the BDS Facebook page, and tell us your friends who like the page, stop wasting our time.

At this point I was extremely tired, so I only wrote down the names of people I knew couldn't enter Israel anyway, people who were already banned and were high profile activists etc... as I felt forced to do so, as the were threats of me being sent to a detention centre and deportation if I refused to do so and I also wanted to keep access of my phone as I was certain they would take my phone if I didn't comply, as I have known other people this has happened to.

I2: **Pulled up photos on his computer of some people, only two of whom I recognised as they go to my university and are in the University's Palestine Society, I was visibly shocked when it was the two people I knew, as they were suggesting that these people were somehow threats, when they are far from such.**

I1: Seems like you know them? How do you know them?

Me: I have seen them around my university a few times that's all.

Which was the truth; I didn't really know them on a personal level at this time, but they weren't taking my response as the truth.

I1: You know here in Israel, we have the best intelligence in the world, don't lie to us because we already know the truth.

Then for the following half an hour, they repeatedly showed me photos of prominent Pro Palestine activists, asking if I knew anything about them or what they do when they visit Israel and the West Bank.

I2: Can you tell us your home address, phone number and home phone number?

Me: **I supplied the same details, now for the third time.**

I1: So what are you doing during your stay in our country?

Me: I will see family and friends.

I1: Where are these family and friends?

Me: I have given all the details to the two people prior to you who have interrogated me.

I1: Wow interrogated? We didn't even start yet **Then laughs with I2**

Me: **I then wrote down for a third time all the details of friends and relatives who I had planned on staying with.**

I1: **Then started reading the jobs and addresses of my friends and relatives, as they had searched for them on the computer**

Ok, go back to the waiting room now.

Me: How long is this going to take? I have done everything you asked, someone is waiting for me and I am extremely tired and dehydrated.

I1: However long the security checks will take.

10:42pm - **After nearly two hours of constant interrogation, I start to make conversation with two girls in the waiting room who were also undergoing 'Israeli security checks'. These two girls were visibly Muslim as they were wearing hijab's, which again re-iterates Israeli security's racial profiling. These girls were from Belgium, of Moroccan descent, visiting as tourists and planned on staying in Jerusalem. As we were talking, we made a few jokes, so we were visibly smiling; this was when an Israeli security official said the two girls had been summoned for an interview.*

*When the two girls returned, they sat far away from me, moved their suitcases away from me and avoided all eye contact with me. It was obvious the security official had told them something about me. When the two girls received the visa's minutes later and were free to leave, they told me why they acted like that. They had told me that the security official had told them not to talk to me or they would get in trouble as I was a 'prominent security threat'. As they told me this it began to make sense, as other people I spoke to acted the same way after being called for an interview. I was travelling alone, so the security officials told people not to speak to me or even acknowledge me as part of their isolation and intimidation offensive.**

11:52pm - **By this time I had already left my seat several times to ask when I would be able to leave as by this point I was nearly there 6 hours. They told me 'Go back to your seat, or the security checks will take longer'.**

1:34am - **By this point I had told my friend who was picking me up to just head home, as it looked like it was going to take even longer if at all. As I was on my phone I also called my mother who was currently back in the UK, as I wasn't sure what to do, so she called the UK foreign office. I was on the phone explaining the situation to her, when a security member told me not use my phone. I continued to talk quietly to my mother explaining what was happening, he then walked to me and said "can you not hear me, turn it off", he then grabbed my phone and ended the call and gave the phone back to me in an extremely aggressive way. He continued to follow me to my seat in the waiting room, watching to see if I would use my phone again**

*I was then summoned for another session of interrogation, by the security member of staff (Interrogator number 3/13) who had told people not to communicate or acknowledge me.**

I3: How long are you staying in Israel for?

Me: A week, actually six days, since I've nearly spent an entire day here now.

I3: **smirks** What are your plans for this trip?

Me: To see family and friends.

I3: What is your home address, phone number and your home number?

Me: **I then supplied my details for the third time.**

I3: What is in your suitcase? Do you have more suitcases in arrivals?

Me: Mainly clothes and make up and no it's just the bags with me now.

I3: Can you open the bag and show me now what is inside?

Me: I would rather have a female member of staff look through my personal belongings

I3: Ok we will do this later. Now tell me, what are you really here for?

Me: I have told you and other staff, I am here to see family and relatives, I have given you all their details, all their addresses, I have even written a day by day plan of where I'm going during my stay here, can you please tell me when I will get my visa and I can leave this airport?

I3: You will get it now, it's printing, go and wait in the waiting room, it will take 5 minutes.

**It did not take 5 minutes, I then waited until 3am, to then to be summoned to a completely different waiting room on the other side of where the original waiting room was, which was old, had a weird smell, broken chairs and was overcrowded with people, flickering dim lights, waiting to be questioned. I waited at this room for 20 minutes, and then I was taken to a private interrogation room with an even worse smell.*

*This is where I first came across interrogator number 4, who was the worst one I had encountered during this whole long process. He was around 6ft tall, appeared to be on steroids, and he looked at me in a way which physically made me feel uncomfortable and was extremely unjustifiably aggressive throughout my encounter with him**

I4: Open your suitcase.

Me: I asked before to have a woman check my suitcase, as there are personal things in my suitcase.

I4: Ok wait and don't touch anything in here

**A female member of security then came in, took everything out of my suitcase, damaging some items, and then gave me a body search, and then had another look through my suitcase once I had put everything back inside, then asked me "Do you have any terrorist objects inside of you", to which I adamantly responded no to. As she was insinuating a cavity search was about to take place, which at that moment I felt the need to cry, as this was above and beyond my privacy and comfort zone. I had already had every inch of my privacy invaded, everything in my suitcase ransacked including my personal items, I was standing without my jacket and top on without shoes after she had physically frisked all of my body. That was the final straw and I mentally broke down. I felt alone as no one was with me, I couldn't even call my mother, and I dreaded what could be coming next. I had already known friends who had, had even worse experiences than me, and it was circling in my mind. She responded with saying "ok" and leaving the room and not holding a cavity search due to my mental episode. I would also just like to add, leaving Israel and coming back to London is also equally as bad. Which I will talk about in detail at the end of my personal account of this day.*

I then waited another 10 minutes waiting for I4 to come back.

*To which he then directed me to a room in the middle of this different waiting room, A vicious fight had also broken out in this waiting a few hours earlier, so I felt very vulnerable in this situation**

I4: How long are you staying in Israel for?

Me: 6 days.

I4: Do you have a return ticket booked?

Me: Yes

I then presented the flight bookings

I4: So why are you here? Don't lie to me

Me: To see family

He then plays on his phone for 5 minutes, answers a phone call and cracks jokes with the security official in the room besides the one we were in

I4: Where is your family living?

Me: Different cities in Israel and the West Bank

I4: West Bank? Why would you go there?

Me: I have family there

I4: I have been there it's a very fucking ugly place, so tell me the fucking truth, why are you here?

Me: I told you to see family

I4: **shouts** **DON'T FUCKING LIE TO ME** **bangs on the desk**

What places you will visit in the west bank?

Me: Bethlehem and Ramallah

I4: I have been to those places very fucking ugly places, I suggest you stop wasting my time, you see all these passports? **Points to a pile of passports on his desk** I have all of these Ukrainian criminals to deal with, don't waste my fucking time.

Me: I want to speak to the British consulate/Embassy right now, I have had enough, put them on the phone.

A random female security official randomly walking round the rooms then says in response to my request

"Under international law we have the right to detain you for 84 hours, you will not be calling anyone."

Me: **I was visibly in shock and stunned, by the absolute double standards and hypocrisy of this country. As this would be the first time Israel would have ever abided by an international law. I was later told that she had even got this law wrong, its 48 hours not 84.**

Let me talk to the British embassy/Consulate right now. I have done everything asked of me, I am extremely tired, I have been here since 5pm and I've had enough.

I5: Tell me again what you will do on your trip.

Me: See family and friends. As I have said so many times in so many interviews now.

I5: Ok, we need your fingerprints, place all your fingers there.

Initially I refused to give my finger prints, as I had entered Israel before without giving them my fingerprints, but IS was extremely aggressive, I felt I had too due to the threats that were made to me throughout the entire interrogation process.

Now look at the camera, we need pictures of you.

I then had to take pictures at all angles and sides, like I was a criminal taking mug shots.

IS: **Was given a piece of paper by a colleague of his**

Now if you want to enter Israel, you must sign this contract, three times, here, here and here.

Me: **I read through the contract, which consisted mainly of 3 paragraphs in Hebrew, English and then in Arabic. It stated how it was forbidden for me to enter the West Bank. If I did enter, upon signing this contract, I would be arrested and would be banned from 'Israel and the Palestinian Territories' for up to 10 years. I had asked to have another contract printed so I could know what exactly I had signed; they refused to supply me with one, or allow me to even take a photo of it. I don't know if this contract was valid for my trip there or for the entirety of my life. If I am not allowed to ever enter the West Bank again, means I can never see my family again who live in the West Bank as they due to Israel, cannot leave, as from my memory no date was specified on the contract. I was also extremely exhausted at this point so was compliant just so I could end this tedious process. Which in hindsight, I believe to be their regular process and method, to isolate, intimidate and exhaust us, to make us more compliant with their demands.**

3:54am - *I was finally given my visa/entry card, and started to make my way to my friend's home, in a city two hours away via public transport at nearly 4am. With all my luggage on hand.*

Tel Aviv to London - *I would also like to highlight the tedious process of leaving Israel back to the UK as someone Palestinian or of Palestinian descent or supportive of the Palestinian cause. What tends to happen upon arrival at Ben Gurion is there will be a queue waiting to speak to an airport worker. This airport worker will ask you a series of questions and from the answers you give, stick a sticker on your passport with certain numbers indicating to customs staff, whether or not to give you additional searches.*

As I am of Palestinian descent, the worker then stuck on my passport the sticker accordingly. As I get to customs security, and put my bags onto the conveyor belt to be scanned, the worker manning the machine asks to see my passport. He then calls over a woman, for me to go to a private area of the airport for 'random additional searches', this happens every time when I'm about to board a flight from Ben Gurion, so it clearly isn't random. Depending on the terminal, the area for additional searches isn't even private, and you will be made to remove 90% of whatever is on your body in front of everyone. I was made to remove the majority of my clothes and shoes, whilst she then scanned every single item in my suitcase. She then set aside some cosmetic items, she felt she liked to keep and told me they were banned items. When these items underwent British customs and security and came through just fine. She then made me wait nearly an hour whilst she continued scanning everything in my suitcase with her weird stick with cotton wool on the end. With all the time she wasted, I had to physically run to the gate and was the last person to board the flight as she had held me up that long.

I would like to say my experience is rare, but it definitely isn't. The reason I was interrogated for 12 hours? Being of Palestinian descent and using my democratic right to boycott in a country that claims to be a democracy. Israel which consistently refers to itself as the 'Only democracy in the Middle East', clearly isn't so, when a point of entry to its country includes an individual's political persuasion. The problem doesn't just lie with not even just having entry to Israel itself, but deciding who can and cannot enter Palestine. Which country in the world has another country deciding who can enter their own country?

