Israeli airport security given green light to search tourist emails

An aerial view of the Israeli coastal city of Tel Aviv's Sde-Dov airport.

Israel's attorney general says security officials can continue to access emails of foreign tourists landing at Ben-Gurion Airport. If they refuse, they can be denied access to the country.
Attorney General Yehuda Weinstein defended the practice in a statement, saying that such searches "are performed only in exceptional instances, after other relevant incriminating indications are found."

He added that travelers were not required to give security officers their password, but instead open the accounts on their own.

But Marc Grey, an attorney for the Association of Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), said the situation has little to do with passwords. "Passwords are not the issue, email accounts are about as private as it gets," he told Reuters.
Although Weinstein added that the traveler is given every right to object the search, he made clear that doing so "will be one of the considerations taken into account when the authorities decide whether to allow his entry into Israel."

The attorney general then took security to the next level, stating that "a person who isn't an Israeli citizen has no vested right to enter Israel. The authority for allowing entry lies with the competent authority." He added that the authority will "naturally take into account the security of the public and the state."

Israeli border police stand guard at Ben Gurion air port near Tel Aviv.(AFP Photo / David Buimovitch)

The attorney general also clarified that Shin Bet's authority to conduct searches at border crossings is detailed in the General Security Service Law - not in the Criminal Procedure Ordinance, as ACRI had previously stated.

Weinstein's comments were in response to a complaint by ACRI, which was filed after reports emerged that Israel's Shin Bet security service was demanding access to personal emails of tourists with Arab names in 2012.

Lila Margalit, an ACRI attorney, said that demands for travelers to give access to private accounts were not justified.

"A tourist...to Israel [who is] interrogated at the airport by Shin Bet agents and told to grant access to their email account, is in no position to give free and informed consent. Such 'consent', given under threat of deportation, cannot serve as a basis for such a drastic invasion of privacy," she said in an email.

In May 2012, two female US citizens of Palestinian origin were interrogated at Ben-Gurion Airport. Security officers searched through one of the female's email accounts, reading emails which contained key words such as "Palestine," "Israel," "West Bank" and "International Solidarity Movement."

After five hours of interrogation, the women were told they had to wait three more hours, after which they were told they would be refused entry into Israel, Haaretz reported.

Margalit has called the practice "invasive," and "not befitting of a democracy."

http://rt.com/news/israel-airport-security-tourist-emails-358/