

US Academic Deported and Banned for Criticizing Israel

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By Toni O'Loughlin, The Guardian

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Norman Finkelstein, the controversial Jewish American academic and fierce critic of Israel, has been deported from the country and banned from the Jewish state for 10 years, it emerged yesterday. Finkelstein, the son of a Holocaust survivor who has accused Israel of using the genocidal Nazi campaign against Jews to justify its actions against the Palestinians, was detained by the Israeli security service, Shin Bet, when he landed at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion airport on Friday.

Shin Bet interrogated him for around 24 hours about his contact with the Lebanese Islamic militia, Hizbullah, when he travelled to Lebanon earlier this year and expressed solidarity with the group which waged war against Israel in 2006. He was also accused of having contact with al-Qaida. But Finkelstein rejected the accusations, saying he had travelled to Israel to visit an old friend.

"I did my best to provide absolutely candid and comprehensive answers to all the questions put to me," he told an Israeli newspaper in an email exchange.

"I am confident that I have nothing to hide. Apart from my political views, and the supporting scholarship, there isn't much more to say for myself: alas, no suicide missions or secret rendezvous with terrorist organisations. I've always supported a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders. I'm not an enemy of Israel."

Finkelstein is one of several scholars rejected by Israel in the increasingly bitter divide in academic circles, between those who support and those who criticise its treatment of Palestinians.

Last year, Israel's most contentious "new historian", Ilan Pappé, left his job as senior lecturer in political science at the University of Haifa after he endorsed the international academic boycott of Israeli institutions, provoking the university president to call for his resignation.

Finkelstein was also refused tenure last year at Chicago's DePaul University for attacking several staunch Israel supporters and academics such as Harvard law professor, Alan Dershowitz.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel said the deportation of Finkelstein was an assault on free speech.

“The decision to prevent someone from voicing their opinions by arresting and deporting them is typical of a totalitarian regime,” said the association’s lawyer, Oded Peler.

“A democratic state, where freedom of expression is the highest principle, does not shut out criticism or ideas just because they are uncomfortable for its authorities to hear. It confronts those ideas in public debate.”

Finkelstein said he was held in a cell and encountered “several unpleasant moments with the guards” and that eventually he borrowed the mobile phone of another detainee and called a friend who in turn called a lawyer.

Although entitled to appeal against the entry ban, Finkelstein said he would not contest it.

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