JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY

Israel

Israel revokes travel permissions for Brad Lander, American rabbis

The travel authorizations for the congressional nominee and other progressive Jewish activists were revoked after they were detained in the West Bank.

By Andrew Lapin October 27, 2026

New York congressional candidate Brad Lander talks to Israeli police forces while participating in a Palestinian olive harvest in the occupied West Bank, Oct. 21, 2026. (Courtesy of Gili Getz/T'ruah)

Israel revoked travel authorizations for several American rabbis, activists and Jewish New York politician Brad Lander following their work last week with Palestinians harvesting olives in the West Bank.

Emails from Israel's immigration authority, shared with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, told the recipients that their electronic travel authorizations had been "revoked" following "a change in circumstances in your case." No further reason was given.

A spokesperson for Lander, a Democratic congressional candidate whose detention by Israel last week sparked an international uproar, confirmed to JTA that his ETA was revoked following his detention.

The spokesperson added that Lander "intends to try to get it back" in order to join a planned congressional delegation with the liberal Zionist lobby J Street in February 2027. Lander is widely expected to win his race next week given that his district is heavily Democratic.

In a longer comment to the left-wing magazine Jewish Currents on Tuesday, Lander said Israel's actions were "petty" and "one small step in this much larger infrastructure of occupation and ethnic cleansing."

The travelers had been working at a Palestinian olive farm near an Israeli settlement when they were detained by Israeli authorities. T'ruah, a rabbinic human rights group, and the other participating Jewish groups said they were there to help Palestinian farmers harvest olives that the farmers had been unable to access for three years.

Rabbi Jill Jacobs, CEO of T'ruah, told JTA that she estimated "more than half" of the approximately 60 Jews detained last week have had their ETAs revoked over a span of several days. Some received notice while still in Israel, though they were allowed to leave without incident.

"It feels pretty random," she said.

Jacobs said that number includes Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist rabbis, as well as progressive Jewish activists. Also joining the olive harvest group were Israelis who had grown up in settlements and others who had lost family in the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attacks, according to a fellow participant.

Foreign visitors are required to hold ETAs to enter Israel. They are typically acquired by tourists, volunteers and business travelers for short-term stays. The process to apply for one is usually quick, involving the payment of a small fee online, and applicants tend to be approved within hours.

It is highly unusual for Israel, which allows almost anyone who can demonstrate Jewish heritage to become a citizen, to take steps to restrict the travel of diaspora Jews. The government has been cracking down more in the last year on ETAs for visitors who protest in the West Bank, Jacobs said. Israel over the weekend denied entry to Rabbi Alissa Wise, an American who leads the left-wing group Rabbis For Ceasefire, Wise told the Religion News Service.

Jacobs said Israel's actions toward the American Jewish clergy in the group were especially troublesome to her in light of right-wing targeting of liberal Jewish movements in the country.

“They’re saying, ‘Actually we only want Jews who have certain political positions. This is not going to be a safe place for all Jews,’” Jacobs said. “They’re saying, ‘We actually don’t care about the mainstream of American Jewry.’”

Representatives for Israel’s Population and Immigration Authority, which processes ETAs, did not return a JTA request for comment. The country is holding elections Tuesday.

Rabbi Marisa James of Congregation Beit Simchat Torah in New York was among the clergy to have their ETAs revoked following their detention. James told JTA that she received the notification while at the airport on Sunday preparing to leave Israel.

“It’s just so sad to me,” James said. Her ETA had been valid through March 2027. For Jews traveling to Israel in the past, she said, “there’s never really been a political litmus test.”

James lived in Jerusalem for five years, working for part of that time with Encounter, a progressive group that arranges tours of the West Bank for American Jews. In her many times crossing into the territory, she said, she had never before encountered resistance from the Israeli military, until last week’s harvest.

She said the military had shown up at the harvest site to turn the activists away. They held James and her fellow international activists for several hours, though Lander was released quickly.

A statement earlier this week from the government office said Israel had deported 11 visa holders, including Americans, from the country following clashes with the Israel Defense Forces during a different protest in Hebron.

The Jews who had their ETAs revoked are allowed to reapply for new authorizations but are unsure of what would happen if they did. Jacobs said she was “hopeful” that a new Israeli government would grant authorizations to the group if they were to reapply.

“I hope there will be a government that actually cares about its relationship with diaspora Jews,” she said.

Just prior to her ETA being revoked, James had been cheering on Israelis arriving at the airport to cast election ballots. Israel does not have absentee voting, and many Israelis assume that the tens of thousands of citizens who have arrived there in recent days are motivated by opposition to the current government.

James, too, is hopeful that a new Israeli government would be friendlier to progressive Jewish visitors whom she says are trying to fight for a better future for the country.

“We feel deeply connected to the place and deeply invested in its future,” she said. “I always grew up thinking, well, that’s what they want, right?”