

[Israel Offers Colombia Anti-Drug Help](#)

The Associated Press

August 24, 1989, Thursday, AM cycle

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Section: International News

Length: 743 words

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Dateline: JERUSALEM

Body

Israel offered the Colombian government help in fighting drugs and asked it for information Thursday about Israeli mercenaries who were said to have trained assassins for cocaine barons.

A Defense Ministry statement said an investigation revealed that the ministry denied a permit more than a year ago to Hod Hahanit, a private security company said to be involved in the training.

Acting without a permit would be a "serious breach of the law," the statement said.

The ministry said a second Israeli firm it did not identify had violated terms of a permit to do security work in Colombia, but that no link to illegal activities had been established.

Yair Tsaban, a legislator from the left-wing party Mapam, demanded Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Foreign Minister Moshe Arens and Attorney General Yosef Harish appear before the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee to explain the involvement of Israelis in Colombia.

"I want to bring up the idea of reserve officers selling weapons and offering training," he said. "We must certainly put limits to this and check and check again how they are working."

Committee chairman Eliahu Ben-Elissar, of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's right-wing Likud bloc, said a hearing would be proposed for next week.

A Foreign Ministry official said privately that Israel offered Colombia "all possible assistance in the struggle against drug traffic" and asked for all information available on the involvement of Israelis.

He said the request was made to the Colombian Foreign Ministry by Michael Ronen, charge d'affaires at the Israeli Embassy in Bogota.

Israeli media said Thursday that four Israeli mercenaries trained paramilitary troops and assassination teams for drug dealers in Central America.

Drug cartel assassins killed a judge, a national police colonel and Colombia's leading presidential candidate last week.

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Israel television and all major dailies identified the head of the training group as Lt. Col. Yair Klein, 44, retired commander of a paratroop anti-terror squad.

A government inquiry began after film was broadcast on American television showing an Israeli officer instructing paramilitary personnel who worked for drug traffickers.

Israeli media identified Klein as the officer and said he ran Hod Hahanit, which operated in South America. The company is listed in the 1988 Israel Defense Sales Directory published by the Defense Ministry.

Its advertisement, which identifies Klein as president, says the firm "specializes in fighting terrorism by establishing and training anti-terror units, internal security and intelligence forces, sophisticated rescue teams ... presidential guard units, and VIP security."

Israel television said the company began operating in Colombia more than two years ago. It said all the company's men had left the country and Klein was expected in Israel on Saturday.

It said Rafael Eytan, an Israeli counterterrorism expert, denied suggestions that he was a consultant to Israeli companies operating in Colombia and said he had cut all business ties to that country.

According to the report, Eytan confirmed he flew to Colombia a week ago for private reasons.

Benny Tal, an Israeli security expert, said former commandos and paratroopers often are recruited by drug cartels.

Tal, who owns a private security firm that trains bodyguards abroad, said in an interview that Israelis often go to the United States with dreams of making fortunes, but find themselves unemployed.

"If someone from a drug cartel comes to him and offers, say, \$100,000 for a job, he'll do it," Tal said.

Tal said Israelis who train illegal paramilitary forces usually are offered \$10,000 a month paid into Swiss bank accounts, plus expenses in local currency.

Israel TV quoted foreign reports about a possible involvement in Colombia by Mike Harari, a former chief of Israeli intelligence in South America and a security chief for Panama's Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega.

Harari, Mossad's former operations chief, left the intelligence agency after a July 1973 fiasco in Norway in which his agents mistook a Moroccan waiter for a Palestinian terrorist and killed him.

Israel TV quoted Zvi Zamir, head of Mossad in 1968-1974, as saying Harari was not involved in military training in Colombia and "one must be insane to tie Harari to drug dealings."

Panama's ambassador to the United States, Juan Sosa, said on Israel radio that Harari entered the United States two weeks ago on a false passport and may have returned to Panama.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: DEFENSE DEPARTMENTS (90%); DRUG POLICY (90%); GOVERNMENT ADVISORS & MINISTERS (90%); INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & NATIONAL SECURITY (90%); NEGATIVE PERSONAL NEWS (90%); STATE DEPARTMENTS & FOREIGN SERVICES (90%); CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES CRIME (89%); COUNTERTERRORISM (89%); CRIME, LAW ENFORCEMENT & CORRECTIONS (89%); DRUG TRAFFICKING (89%); FOREIGN RELATIONS (89%); ILLEGAL DRUGS (89%); PARAMILITARY & MILITIA (89%); TERRORISM (89%); ASSASSINATION (78%); COCAINE (78%); EMBASSIES & CONSULATES (78%); HEADS OF STATE & GOVERNMENT (78%); INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (78%); NATIONAL SECURITY (77%); SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE FORCES (77%); POLICE FORCES (76%); JUDGES (74%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (73%);

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Industry: DEFENSE DEPARTMENTS (90%); DEFENSE INDUSTRY (77%); INVESTIGATION & SECURITY SERVICES (77%); DEFENSE SECTOR PERFORMANCE (72%); SECURITY GUARD SERVICES (72%); ARMED FORCES (63%)

Geographic: BOGOTA, COLOMBIA (78%); JERUSALEM, ISRAEL (59%); COLOMBIA (96%); ISRAEL (96%); SOUTH AMERICA (79%); CENTRAL AMERICA (53%)

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