

BBC Says That Israel is in Northern Iraq

Source: Melek DURBAKAN (JTW) and News Agency

- According to BBC, Kurdish soldiers were secretly trained by former Israeli commandos in northern Iraq to protect a new international airport and in counter-terrorism operations.
- Avivi, Israel's Ambassador to Ankara, told the Turkish academicians in USAK that Israel has done nothing in Iraq without informing Turkey. Avivi says Israel supports Iraq's unity and against a possible Kurdish state in the region.
- A number of Israeli companies have won contracts with the Kurdish government in northern Iraq to train and equip Kurdish security forces and build an international airport, Yedioth Ahronoth, Israeli newspaper, had reported in 2005
- Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev told Newsnight Israel had not authorized any firms to do defense work in Iraq. Firms would be prosecuted if police found they had broken export laws, he said.

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The BBC reports on Tuesday that former Israel Defense Forces commandos secretly trained Kurdish soldiers in Northern Iraq to protect a new international airport and in counter-terrorism operations.

Former Israeli special-forces soldiers crossed into Iraq from Turkey in 2004 to train two sets of Iraqi Kurdish troops, one of the former Israeli trainers told the BBC's Newsnight program. The former trainer, whose name was not disclosed, said IDF soldiers trained Kurds to act as a security force for the new airport in the northern Iraqi city of Erbil (Irbil), mostly populated Kurdish.

They also trained more than 100 Peshmerga (Pesmerge) or Kurdish fighters for "special assignments" that included how to use rifles and how to shoot militants in a crowd, he said.

The former soldier said he believed Kurdish officials knew the trainers were Israelis although the troops did not.

"My part of the contract was to train the Kurdish security people for a big airport project and for training, as well as the Peshmerga, and the actual soldiers, the army," the former IDF soldier told Newsnight.

"You know, day by day it's a bit tense because you know where you are and you know who you are. And there's always a chance that you'll get revealed," he added.

Iraqi newspapers have reported that Israeli soldiers have trained Kurdish troops but the Kurdish authorities deny allowing any Israelis into Iraq.

The Kurds' political enemies have long accused them of an alliance with Israel while Israel's critics suspect it wants to use the Kurdish region as a strategic base to get closer to its arch-enemy Iran.

Iraqi Kurdistan sits between Iran to the east and Turkey to the north-west. Both countries have significant Kurd minorities and are worried about a Kurdish state emerging in northern Iraq.

Newsnight also reported that an Israeli security firm called Interop and two Swiss-registered subsidiaries, Kudo

and Colosium, were among the main contractors at Irbil airport, providing security fencing and communications equipment.

Khaled Salih, a spokesman for the Kurdistan Regional Government, dismissed the former IDF soldier's claims.

"These are not new allegations for us. Back in the Sixties and Seventies we were called 'the second Israel' in the region and we were supposed to be eliminated by Islamist nationalist and now Islamist groups," he told Newsnight.

The former IDF soldier said he trained Kurds in "anti-terror lessons ... how to shoot first, how to identify a terrorist in a crowd. That's clearly special assignments.

Israeli Yedioth Ahronoth: Israelis Train Kurds

Israel's leading newspaper Yedioth Ahronot had reported in 2005 that a number of Israeli companies have won contracts with the Kurdish government in northern Iraq to train and equip Kurdish security forces and build an international airport. According to the Yedioth Ahronoth report, dozens of Israelis with a background in elite military combat training have been working for 'private' Israeli companies in northern Iraq where they helped the Kurds establish elite anti-terror units.

According to the report, leading Israeli companies in the field of security and counter-terrorism have set up a training camp under the codename Z at a secret location in a desertic region in northern Iraq, where Israeli experts provide training in live fire exercises and self-defense to Kurdish security forces.

* La Stampa: Israelis in Northern Iraq under Fake IDs

Similarly the Italian la Stampa daily paper reported that many Israeli military men were in Northern Iraq under fake names to help the Kurds to establish a strong army. According to the La Stampa's December 2005 report the first contacts between the Kurds and Israel were established by Dany Yaton, former head of the MOSSAD. The paper also published the picture of the Israeli soldiers in an Iraqi airport.

* 'Illegal and Secret Operations'

In 2006, Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronot reported that the Israelis in Iraq operated illegally and secretly. According to the Israeli newspaper, their operations were against even the Israeli laws.

It was understood that the Israelis did not only provide equipments but also intelligence to the Kurdish leaders. Most of the Israelis who helped the Kurdish military were retired officers according to the papers.

* The New Yorker: Kurds are Israel's B Plan

Seymour M. Hersh from the New Yorker was another journalist who revealed Israel's secret activities among the Iraqi Kurds. Hersh says in his 'Plan B' article of 30 June 2004:

"Israeli intelligence and military operatives are now quietly at work in Kurdistan, providing training for Kurdish commando units and, most important in Israel's view, running covert operations inside Kurdish areas of Iran and Syria. Israel feels particularly threatened by Iran, whose position in the region has been strengthened by the war. The Israeli operatives include members of the Mossad, Israel's clandestine foreign-intelligence service, who work undercover in Kurdistan as businessmen and, in some cases, do not carry Israeli passports."

Israel has denied all these 'claims', and argued that there is no single official Israeli who helped the Kurds.

Israel's secret operations in the region have mostly disturbed Turkey. Turkish press claimed that Israel had a secret agenda in the region arguing Israel aims to establish a pro-Israeli Kurdish state in Iraq. Turkey has been against separation of Iraq and has seen a possible Kurdish state as a threat to the regional peace and stability.

Pinhas Avivi, Israel's Ambassador to Ankara (Turkey), told the Turkish academicians and journalist in his lecture in USAK that Israel has done nothing special in Iraq without informing Turkey. Ambassador Avivi also said Israel is against a Kurdish state in Iraq.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev told Newsnight Israel had not authorized any firms to do defense work in Iraq. Firms would be prosecuted if police found they had broken export laws, he said.

Assoc. Prof. Dr.Sedat Laciner, head of the Ankara-based Turkish think tank USAK (International Strategic Research Organization) told the JTW that Turkey is not happy with Israel's Kurdish policy. "Turkish people think that Israel has secret plans to establish a Kurdish state in the region though the Israeli authorities refuse the claims" Dr. Laciner added.

Laciner further continued:

"Turkey-Israel co-operation is crucial for stability in the Middle East yet Israel's Kurdish policy undermines the relations as the American PKK policy has undermined Turkey-US relations. Turkish people do not want to hear any deny or any promise but concrete measures. If Israel and the US seek food relations with Turkey, I think the most crucial area is the PKK terrorism and Kurdish separatism. If Israel can persuade the Turks about its sincerity, it would be the greatest contribution to Turkish-Israeli relations".

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