

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

Who runs the police?

A reorganization of Israel's interior ministry is disputed and Bolivia's cocaine coup may answer why.

The shadowy activities of a retired Israeli general and controversy over Israel's lucrative illicit arms and dope-trafficking trade in Latin America may be the two keys to understanding a bitter political fight that has just broken out in Israel.

The fight centers around the Dec. 31 firing of Police Inspector-General Herzl Shafir by Israeli Interior Minister Yosef Burg, whose ministry has had control over national police activities since a 1977 reorganization.

Burg claimed that he was firing Shafir because of alleged irregularities committed by Israeli police investigators assigned to the case of Religious Affairs Minister Aharon Abu-Hatzeira, a member of Burg's National Religious Party. Abu-Hatzeira has been indicted by the Israeli courts for funneling state monies to members of his family.

Shafir has countercharged that Burg's real motive is to suppress evidence implicating Burg's interior ministry in financial irregularities and fraudulent activities.

The cabinet of Prime Minister Menachem Begin has rallied to Shafir's defense. The opposition Labour Party is assailing Burg's handling of the case. Supporters of Shafir have taken the issue to the Israeli Supreme Court.

One mystery man has gone unnoticed and untouched: General Rehavam Ze'evi. Ze'evi served as a

special counterterrorism adviser to the Labour government of Yitzhak Rabin until 1976-77, when he became a special adviser to several Latin American governments. Before his departure, Ze'evi (also known as "Gandhi") began to be frequently mentioned in the Israeli press as a key controller of the growing international-in-scope Israeli mafia; he features prominently as a criminal operative in the 1980 book *The Israel Connection* by Jacques Derogy, a writer for the French magazine *L'Express*.

Despite these seedy connections, and admissions on Ze'evi's part during 1980 that he maintained friendly relations with organized crime figures in Israel, Ze'evi was appointed by Burg in spring 1980 to a special post as coordinator for relations between the interior ministry and the police. Included in this post were assignments to recommend alterations in the ministry's relations with police.

According to accounts published in the *Jerusalem Post* among others during the summer, Shafir was an outspoken opponent of the Ze'evi appointment, both to the man and his proposals, which involved shifting more and more power to the interior ministry and away from the police.

The controversy began to peak in August, when Israel's connections to the Latin American-based drug mobs began to surface around

Israel's relations to the newly installed "cocaine junta" in Bolivia: in August, a major arms deal between Israel and Bolivia was announced, which was to be the precursor of Israeli assistance for production of Bolivia's coca crop. Shortly after the coup and the arms deal, Israel and Bolivia inked a contract for "rural agricultural development." Bolivia's leading cash crop is, notoriously, cocaine.

The Bolivia deal was just the tip of the iceberg. Latin America is the key target zone for hundreds of millions of dollars in Israeli exports for the next decade. This involves not only apparent above-board commercial deals mediated largely through the Israeli Bank Hapoalim, the banking arm of the Histadrut national labor confederation which has established branches across Latin America; it also involves arms sales to Latin America and an increase of Israeli mafia involvement in drug trafficking.

This new phase of Israeli-Latin American relations undoubtedly brought to the fore bitter institutional struggles in Israel.

These struggles reflect both a fight for control over the vast wealth being promised in Latin America and mounting resistance from remaining legitimate antidrug elements in Israel's police force.

Any honest cop in Israel knows that the interior ministry is a sieve for criminal operations. It has been traditionally run by the otherworldly figures of the National Religious Party, who provide a convenient "screen" for the free operation of criminals. By seeking to expand the interior ministry's role in policing operations, Ze'evi was undoubtedly trying to open the door wide in Israel for his mafia friends.