

# Yair Klein – Brief

## Who is Yair Klein?

The mercenary Yair Klein is a retired Israeli Army officer and a former member of the country's Special Forces, where he learned all his Israeli military defense secrets. He was a participant in audacious military actions such as the one in 1972 to rescue dozens of hostages held captive in a Libyan airplane at the Lod airport in Tel Aviv. He is also considered a military hero from the *Yom Kippur* war (1973) between his country and Egypt and Syria.

When he was just 36, but with vast experience in the military field, at the end of the seventies, he decided to leave the Israeli Army and create his own security consulting firm: Hod He'hanitin (Spearhead Ltd), a medium-sized firm operating out of an office in Tel Aviv. Klein's first connection with large-scale armed actions against civilian and terrorist organizations dates back to 1982. His company, as Klein tells it, was in charge of supplying military ammunitions to the Christian Phalangists (Lebanese extreme right) responsible for the massacre in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon. On September 16, 1982, they assassinated between 500 and 800 Palestinians according to Israeli sources and between 4,000 and 6,000 according to Arab sources.

## Klein's activities in Colombia

From 1985 to 1987 illegal armed structures were formed with the double purpose of attacking subversives and protecting drug trafficking interests. Thus the first structures of illegal paramilitaries groups were created in Puerto Boyacá there. The *Autodefensas del Magdalena Medio* were established (Puerto Boyacá, Puerto Berrio, Puerto Parra, Cimitarra, Barrancabermeja, San Vicente del Chucurí and Carmen del Chucurí, among others), before extending to other regions of the country. The paramilitary phenomenon took root wherever there was a convergence of guerrilla pressure and drug trafficking interests, such as the Llanos Orientales (*Carranceros* in San Martín, Puerto López and Puerto Gaitán in Meta), in Urabá (*Tangueros*), and in the northeast of Antioquia (*Muerte a Revolucionarios del Nordeste* in Segovia, El Bagre, Valdivia, Remedios, Zaragoza). In that era, however, those illegal paramilitaries structures were characterized by having little capacity, organization, or military training.

It was the military training and instruction by foreign mercenaries, especially Israelis, hired by the drug trafficking industry, especially the Medellín Cartel, that produced the transformation of these incipient structures into armed organizations capable of engaging in a true offensive against guerrilla groups, against the State, and against Colombian society. At this precise moment the Israeli mercenary Yair Klein appears in Colombian history.

The Israeli mercenary's first contact with Colombia was in 1987 when, as he declared to the national media, he arrived to Colombia to convince the National Police to hire his company to train its members in defense and security matters. In 1988 and 1989 he made subsequent visits to the country: "*That was when they hired me to give courses in Puerto Boyacá,*" he declared to the *Semana* magazine in 2002.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Yair Klein, the Israeli mercenary who initiated instruction of the paramilitaries, captured in Russia" at [www.semana.com](http://www.semana.com) August 28, 2007.

It was precisely that illegal activity carried out by Mr. Klein and other Israeli advisors, which was acknowledge by the Colombian judicial authorities, as part of judicial proceedings, with fully guaranteed procedural rights where evidence was presented that warranted the characterization of the crime of "instruction and training in military or terrorist procedures" (article 15 of Decree 180 of 1988).

Yair Klein had full knowledge of the illegal nature of his actions in Colombia. Just "as can be seen in the document issued by the Director of the Division for Central and South America and the Caribbean at the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the license granted by the government to Mr. Klein's company 'Hod He'hanitin' for the export of war material and security 'know-how' was cancelled on October 30, 1986, due to new regulations at the Ministry of Defense (of Israel)."<sup>2</sup> In addition, "after the cancellation the company representatives requested permission for undertaking activities in Colombia, but it was flatly denied. (...) So when Mr. Klein offered his services he knew he was breaking the law."<sup>3</sup>

As can be observed from the court ruling issued by the Criminal Court of the Superior District Court of Manizales, Mr. Yair Klein instructed members of the illegal paramilitaries groups in terrorist tactics and techniques, as well as in the manufacture and use of weapons, especially explosives. In the words of that Court:

"[...] the evidence gathered in the proceedings demonstrates that Mr. Yair Klein was in the country [Colombia] instructing personnel, both paramilitaries and some narcotics traffickers, in weapons and explosives and in the execution of different armed operations.

Mr. Alonso de Jesús Baquero Agudelo, who gave a meticulous and lengthy narration, of which substantial sections have been corroborated by different facts and evidence, was a student in the course and pointed out Mr. Klein as the instructor [...]

[...]

Now, Mr. Baquero participated in that preparation for two months. This implies that there is no danger of error in pointing out the right person, because such a length of time permits one to retain both the name and the physiognomy of a person beyond all doubt.

[...]

Mr. Klein offered different services, all of them related to armed forces or armed struggles: opening a training school, techniques for actions against terrorism, the provision of equipment and instruction for security and armored truck transportation companies, and training for bodyguards.

In other words, services very similar to those it provided to the organizations called paramilitary groups and men sent by people such as Pablo Escobar, Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, and Víctor Carranza."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Republic of Colombia, Judicial Branch, Superior Judicial District Court of Manizales, Criminal Court. Judgment on June 22, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Republic of Colombia, Judicial Branch, Superior Judicial District Court of Manizales, Criminal Court. Judgment on June 22, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Republic of Colombia, Judicial Branch, Superior Judicial District Court of Manizales, Criminal Court. Judgment on June 22, 2001.

Among the people who received instruction from Yair Klein was the renowned member of the illegal paramilitaries groups Alonso de Jesús Baquero (Alias “El Negro” or “Vladimir”). Vladimir was captured by the Colombian authorities and prosecuted.

“During an amplification of the declaration made on December 4, 1995 in the Palmira prison, he provided meticulous detail on the activities of Israeli mercenaries in the training of paramilitaries in the Middle Magdalena Valley in 1987-88. Among the groups contacted to send men to be trained were the groups led by the best known drug trafficking capos, both nationally and internationally: Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha (sent 15 people with his son Fredy), Pablo Escobar, Víctor Carranza (sent 5 people with one of his nephews), Fidel Castaño, and Henry Pérez. The course, taught by 4 Israelis, lasted for two months. The cost of the course, calculated at USD 2.500 for each one of the 80 participants, was mostly financed by drug traffickers, with some participation from cattle ranchers in the Middle Magdalena Valley and banana growers in Urabá (Uniban). In gratitude for Uniban’s financial contribution, paramilitary penetration of the Uraba region commenced: Necoclí, Carepa and Arboletes. There was a second course that began on the Isla de la Fantasía, near Puerto Boyacá, and then it was moved to Puerto López, in the Llanos.”<sup>5</sup>

It has also been proved that the members of the illegal armed groups who were trained by Yair Klein have committed numerous massacres. For example, the abovementioned Alonso de Jesús Baquero, alias “Vladimir,” participated actively in multiple actions of armed violence by the illegal paramilitaries groups. Two of them, The cases of the “19 Merchants” and the “Rochela Massacre”, were acknowledged by the Colombian authorities<sup>6</sup>, and by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

These two examples, in addition to the information described above, prove evident implementation of the military and terrorist instruction developed by Yair Klein in the Middle Magdalena Valley. For these actions he was convicted in the Courts of Colombia, by means of a judgment that fully respected procedural guarantees and which included the exhaustion of a second instance before the District Court of Manizales.

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<sup>5</sup> “Deuda con la Humanidad. Paramilitarismo de Estado 1988-2003” Debt to Humanity: The State and the Paramilitary Movement 1988-2003”, Cinep, Human Rights and Political Violence Data Bank. Bogotá: CINEP, 2004. page 10.

<sup>6</sup> For which he was duly investigated by the State, and subsequently taken to court, where he was found criminally responsible.