



by Mark A. Bruzonsky

The Harari/Noreiga Affair ... Not Over Yet

Washington, January 14 -- Another potential scandal looms for Israel. Consequently, of course, both the Israeli government and the Bush Administration are doing all they can to bury it, or at least to contain it.

More and more it appears that Mike Harari, the "former" high-ranking Israeli Mossad agent who was one of Manuel Noriega's closest associates, may have been working undercover for or at least "with" the Israelis.

Indeed the pattern of such Israeli entanglements has become all too obvious in recent years. Operatives who can be "denied" if need be are used for various purposes where sensitive intelligence gathering, arms sales, covert actions, drug sales, and illicit money are involved.

Even if exposed, and even though the person was once a known Mossad agent, the Israelis simply deny the operative was still working; for them, challenging everyone to prove otherwise. And usually they get away with it.

Not only does the American government have its own reasons for cooperating in these coverups, but Israel's extensive penetration of Washington through the multifaceted Jewish lobby here gives them quite an edge in trying to tilt things their way.

Furthermore, of course, since firm evidence is usually lacking -- a smoking gun that could prove direct Israeli government involvement -- the pattern has become that while some elements of the press play things up for a few days it's not long before the story fades and everyone goes on to new news.

It has become widely known that Harari was in Panama in the hours just before the American invasion a few weeks ago. More recently it has become known that he was tipped off by friends of Israel at both the Pentagon and State Department, probably through their own friends associated with the Mossad.

What was involved was far more important than just giving Harari a chance to flee; though that in itself was an important consideration for his arrest and interrogation might have proved quite an embarrassment for Israel.

But even more importantly, from Israel's point of view, the tip off

apparently gave Harari time to finish destroying (or send out of Panama) what is said to be considerable evidence of extensive Israeli involvement with Noriega over the years. It is further likely that this evidence also concerns Harari's own personal involvement in Noriega's illicit drug dealing, arms sales activities, as well as drug money laundering.

Just as with the Jonathan Pollard scandal there are severe tensions in Washington right now concerning what is being termed "the Harari affair." At top pro-Israeli levels of the Bush Administration -- orchestrated by Larry Eagleburger at the State Department and Brent Scowcroft at the White House -- a major effort is underway to bury the Harari story and protect the Israeli-American connection.

But at other less political levels where the responsibility (as well as the mindset) is to uncover what really happened and apply the law, Harari's involvements with Noriega are being investigated with the intention of an indictment. Rumors that this could possibly be leading to an extradition request to the Israelis -- though as in previous cases it is most unlikely the Israelis would comply -- are being whispered here, possibly as trial balloons.

Something similar happened with the Pollard scandal. At the highest levels of the Reagan Administration there was a desire to play down the seriousness of Pollard's spying. But at both the Pentagon and the Justice Department there were persons at the professional levels who had the responsibility to protect American national secrets and prosecute American spies who refused to allow the matter to simply be politically spiked.

The Harari affair is tremendously complicated for both the U.S. and Israel by the impending trial of Noriega himself.

Clearly the former Panamanian strongman has alot to bargain with. His involvements over the years with the CIA, Mossad, and various other intelligence services could prove exceedingly embarrassing for Washington. He is also probably the one single person who could spill the beans concerning Harari and Israel -- indeed this may be one of the

main bargaining cards Noriega has at this point.

So a major containment effort is of course also underway concerning Noriega. He will be tried for specific charges of drug trafficking in a way that will allow the Bush Administration to argue with the court that many things Noriega might want to raise are not pertinent and thus not admissible.

Furthermore the American Government seems intent on keeping Noriega isolated until trial and then put away for a long time after trial. In short, the Americans don't intend to give Noriega a chance or a forum to speak up, either than in relation to the drug trafficking charges.

Still there is considerable anxiety here that when the trial finally does get underway unless there is a bargain struck at each step of the way Noriega's attorneys will constantly attempt to present evidence that many others were implicated to, or at least knowledgeable about, Noriega's various activities.

The one newspaper that has so far taken the lead regarding "the Harari affair" is The Washington Times -- the right-wing paper whose editorial pages are a hodgepodge of pro-Israeli sentiments but whose news pages have sometimes been more willing than others to point a finger at Israel when American interests are directly involved.

"Did Israeli secrets plane flee Panama?" screamed the paper's headline across the full top of the page last Thursday. The story went on to suggest that an Israeli C-130 cargo plane "carrying evidence of Israel's ties to the regime of Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega" took off from Panama City about six hours before U.S. troops assaulted Panama December 20th.

But this is only a part of the story now being investigated here. For not only was the warning leaked to Harari used to Israel's benefit, it may have also led to more American casualties and more resistance to the American invasion than might otherwise have been the case.

This is the thrust of a recently delivered private communication from a former Congressional assistant and family friend of President Bush to a key Republican Senator and a number of other senior

Washington political personalities.

According to this communication -- the heart of which is an appeal for an urgent Senate investigation -- a former U.S. Ambassador and a European reporter who was in Panama at the time of the invasion have reached the following conclusions:

1) Harari warned Noriega about the invasion after himself getting word probably through Mossad channels; 2) This led to the strengthening of Panamanian defenses and thus the killing and wounding of more of the American invaders than would have otherwise been the case; as well as giving Noriega the time he needed to hide from the invading forces;

3) Some kind of a deal was made regarding Harari who emerged from hiding soon after the invasion and was taken away by civilians, "probably Mossad and/or CIA" according to the memo.

It is not specifically known, however, whether there are credible persons or irrefutable evidence that can verify these assertions. An effort is underway at this time to ascertain just what kind of testimony might be possible should there be any type of Congressional investigation.

It's likely, of course, that the Israeli/Jewish lobby will use its capabilities to block such a development and protect Israel; just as was the case with the Senate's Iran/Contra Hearings which pretty much overlooked Israel's substantial involvement. But even if both Congress and the press are prevented from further investigation of the details of the Harari connection to Noriega, this scandal may be one that will unravel slowly over time.

The trial of Noriega is going to be very complicated and time-consuming. There are a number of major and novel legal issues that need to be resolved. And the defense may well try to raise a great many very sensitive and secret issues.

Just how the presiding judge decides to deal with issues like the admissibility of and the relevance of various forms of evidence may determine whether we will ever know the full story of Mike Harari's and Israel's involvement with Manuel Noriega.