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DYSFUNCTIONS

The Secret Weapon of the Stars - Israeli Bodyguards

By Susan Karlin, C4i 9/12/07

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It's the latest celebrity craze since adopting African babies - an Israeli bodyguard with training from the Israel Defense Forces.

Recently, Lohan unveiled her new bodyguard - an unnamed ex-Israeli Army specialist. Kevin Federline's lawyer hired IDF-trained Aaron Cohen, founder of the Beverly Hills-based IMS Security, to serve Britney Spears' camp with subpoenas for their custody battle. Even that dubious friend to the Jews, Mel Gibson, has relied on one to part the waters for him. For more than a decade, Avi Korein was Gibson's personal bodyguard before he opened his own Beverly Hills security firm, Screen International Security Services.

So what's the allure of these Israeli security mavens? According to industry experts, it's a combination of discretion and training.

"There's a mystique surrounding the Israeli military, based on their past performance and handling of information," says an American IDF-trained security specialist in the Washington, DC area who gives his name solely as "Josh" for security purposes. Josh served in the Israeli infantry as a designated marksman from 2004-6 through Mahal 2000, a preparatory program for non-Israelis who want to serve in its army.

"Discretion at all times is paramount with Israelis in regards to operational and personal security," he told ISRAEL21c.

"In America, particularly in the celebrity scene, there are occasional leaks of personal information," he adds. "But it doesn't happen as much in Israel. Privacy is of great concern. That attitude and conditioning translates to the private security field. Bodyguards revealing secrets about celebrity clients is considered unprofessional and in poor taste."

While celebrities might favor their ability to check wagging tongues, security firm CEOs seek out ex-Israeli military members for their training - particularly when it comes to high-alert situations.

"The Israeli intelligence gathering is among the best. I don't have to train them as much" as people from other backgrounds, says Emiel Fisher, the CEO of RDP Worldwide in Richmond, Virginia, who has handled security for touring rock stars. "They garner a lot of respect from the private security industry."

Elijah Shaw, CEO of Icon Services Corporation in St. Paul, Minnesota, once hired an ex-Israeli commando to guard a famous actress who was being stalked on an international tour.

"I've used members of the Israel Special Forces - its equivalent of the Navy Seals - when I've had a specific, high-level threat," says Shaw, whose clients include Naomi Campbell, Michael Bolton and 50 Cent. "They operate at such a heightened sense of awareness. Because of the constant conflicts there, they're always on alert; they never switch off."

IDF-trained security specialists often see more similarities than differences between guarding celebrities and countries.

"Stalking is a form of terror," counter-terrorism expert Aaron Cohen told The Forward in October. "The formula is a lot like counter-terrorism, because you need to see who you're dealing with before you freak out."

Cohen is a Beverly Hills native who served in the elite Israeli combat unit Duvdevan, which specialized in tracking terrorists. He founded IMS - Israeli Military Specialists - a Los Angeles-based private security firm operating in Hollywood.

"The same security principles apply whether a person is going out to dinner or out of the country," adds 'Josh'. "Counter-surveillance is employed as a protective tool. The things that affect a client is not necessarily terrorism. The idea is to protect a client against harm or embarrassment. We focus a great deal on behavioral profiling - how to assess threats through situational awareness - for example, body language exhibited by one member of a group that contrasts the others can indicate the individual has a different agenda or intent. You take in everything and ID what doesn't belong."

With personal screening like that, it's no wonder that Hollywood's elite are putting their trust in this new breed of Israeli commando.

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