

From: PSC Stellenbosch PSC.Stellenbosch@gmail.com
Subject: Fwd:
Date: 17 October 2024 at 19:09: PM
To:

PS

Begin forwarded message:

From: Iqbal Jassat <iqbal.jassat45@gmail.com>
Date: 14 October 2024 at 16:20:58 PM SAST
To: Paul Hendler <psc.stellenbosch@gmail.com>

[10/14, 10:49] null: Excerpt: News24 contacted Bayhack's mother, who cut the call and blocked the reporter. Messages sent to her on WhatsApp were read but not responded to. News24 visited Bayhack's Sandton home where neighbours said *he had visited but had returned to Israel on Monday morning* !!

[10/14, 10:51] null: *[Full article](#).*

A 22-year-old Johannesburg man has been identified as a member of an elite sniper unit in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), whose members have admitted to killing unarmed civilians in Gaza.

Sandton resident Aaron Bayhack, who matriculated from King David Linksfield Schools in 2020, is one of 21 men belonging to a squadron within the IDF's Battalion 202, known as the Refaim (Ghost).

In a documentary titled The Ghost Unit, released on X by Palestinian investigative journalist Younis Tirawi on 4 October, Bayhack is named as one of the Refaim's members.

Members of this unit originate from around the world, from countries that include Germany, France, the US, Italy and Ethiopia, while others are Israelis who have dual citizenship.

The unit is described in the documentary as "an elite unit in the Israeli sniper corps that represents the pinnacle of precision, where only the most skilled snipers are chosen after years of rigorous training".

This casts a light on the involvement of South Africans in Israel's war on Gaza in which about 43 000 Palestinians have been killed by the IDF. The war began after Gaza's ruling Hamas attacked Israel on 7 October last year, killing more than 1 000 people.

According to the documentary, Bayhack's unit was responsible for "eliminating" around 100 people they believe to be "terrorists". Some of those killed were unarmed and trying to retrieve the bodies of others who were killed by the snipers.

The Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act requires any South African wishing to render foreign military assistance in another country to first apply to the National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC), which will then make a recommendation to the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans. The department's spokesperson, Siphwe Dlamini, did not respond to an inquiry on whether Bayhack had made such an application.

Chrispin Phiri, spokesperson for International Relations and Cooperation Minister Ronald Lamola, said while South Africa allows its citizens to hold dual citizenship, "military activity carried out illegally outside of the citizenship, is considered mercenary activity and is illegal".

Some of the footage in Tirawi's 38-minute documentary was taken by unit members themselves, including a video recorded on thermal vision they had uploaded to YouTube. The video shows two apparently unarmed men being shot at by unnamed Ghost Unit members in November last year.

Other footage includes four members of the Refaim – not including Bayhack – sniping at victims from a distance of 1 260m in Khan Younis, ostensibly to set a sniping distance record. Tirawi reports that their targets were likely civilians, including elderly women, who were near the entrance of Nasser Hospital.

Tirawi has produced work for highly respected investigative journalism platform Bellingcat, as well as Al Jazeera.

The documentary includes a team photograph of the Ghost Unit taken during a ceasefire in December last year in Gaza, in which Bayhack is seen smiling and on one knee. Bayhack is also seen in the documentary in a military operation inside Gaza.

News24 has obtained other photographs, including one showing Bayhack wearing a broad smile and

holding what appears to be a 50 caliber sniper rifle among a group of 20 other heavily armed men from the unit.

In another picture, he is posing with a 50 caliber rifle while lying on the floor in a building of indeterminate location, and looking through its mounted lens. This image, which Tirawi told News24 was screengrabbed from a WhatsApp status date-stamped 1 August 2023 – before the war began - featured a caption written in Hebrew that translates to: "Good morning from Bayhak Ks."

In another image screengrabbed from the unit's WhatsApp group, date-stamped 8 February 2024, four months into the war, a picture of a bare-chested Bayhack, with bombed out buildings in the background, bears a caption in Hebrew which translates to: "Another interesting fact about the squad...In the ground manoeuvre, Bayhak was the first of the entire battalion to eliminate a terrorist."

The documentary features an interview with Ghost Unit member Daniel Raab who says his team killed unarmed men of military age. Raab tells the interviewer that the two unarmed men filmed using thermal vision were killed for walking in a combat zone a few hundred metres away from their position.

"He's a dead man. There's nobody there who is of military age that will walk around where they're literally looking at an IDF force. What? Are they stupid?" he says in Hebrew. News24 has confirmed that the subtitles to the documentary are accurate. Attempts to reach Bayhack to confirm his membership of the Ghost Unit were unsuccessful. He locked his Facebook account on Monday last week. His biography also states that he lives in Tel Aviv but comes from Johannesburg. His other social media accounts, including LinkedIn, were disabled.

News24 contacted Bayhack's mother, who cut the call and blocked the reporter. Messages sent to her on WhatsApp were read but not responded to. News24 visited Bayhack's Sandton home where neighbours said he had visited but had returned to Israel on Monday morning.

In December last year, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation said it worried about South Africans joining the IDF in Israel's war on Gaza. The department said such action could contribute to the violation of international law and the commission of further international war crimes, thus making those soldiers liable for prosecution in South Africa.

"The South African government needs to take action on this because after all, people are going to fight for a genocidal force which should not be encouraged," said Allan Horwitz from South African Jews for a Free Palestine, echoing the South African government's contention before the International Court of Justice that Israel is committing genocidal acts in Gaza.

South African Zionist Federation chairperson Rowan Polovin declined to comment.

Human Rights lawyer Ziyaad Patel, who compiled and submitted a dossier on South Africans fighting in the IDF to the Hawks and the National Prosecuting Authority, said no action had been taken.

