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Kach and Meir Kahane: The Emergence of Jewish Quasi-Fascism

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I: Origins and Development

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Introduction

Most Israelis were shocked and surprised when they learned on 24 July 1984 that Kach, the right-wing political party of Rabbi Meir Kahane, had won a seat in the Knesset. With nearly 26,000 votes, Kahane achieved his aim of entering Israel's parliament. This gave him a public forum and parliamentary immunity from police 'harassment'. Soon after his election, Kahane made it clear that he had no intention of becoming an ordinary parliamentarian. Devoted to his original plan of driving the Arabs out of the Land of Israel, Kahane said that a coalition government incapable of maintaining the integrity of the Jewish nation would not gain his parliamentary support, nor would he abandon his planned illicit confrontations with Arabs in their own villages.

A day after the election, Kahane and his supporters held a victory parade to the Western Wall in old Jerusalem. Passing intentionally through the Arab section of the old city, Kahane's excited followers smashed through the market, overturning vegetable stalls, hitting bystanders, punching the air with clenched fists and telling the frightened Arabs that the end of their stay in the Land of Israel was near.

Since no such extreme party had ever previously won representation in the Knesset, there was great public disquiet. Public anxiety was aggravated when it was learned that support for Kahane among young people was proportionally much higher than in the population at large. Kahane secured more than 2.5 per cent of the army vote and occasional polls in high schools and *yeshivot* have demonstrated significant approval of his views. This gave rise to the feeling that Kahane did not only present a problem, but that a new phenomenon had arisen, a 'Kahane syndrome': a genuine social and cultural need to maintain an openly aggressive anti-Arab posture combined with the threat of street hooliganism.

The purpose of this article is to present a profile of Kach and its leader,

Rabbi Meir Kahane. The main thesis is that Kach is a quasi-fascist movement, the first of its kind in the history of Israel, and that it has acquired this character during a long process of politicization. From a minority self-defence movement in the United States, it has evolved into an aggressive and racist movement in Israel, claiming to speak in the name of the majority.

American origins

Kach's origins go back to 1968, when Meir Kahane, an unknown young rabbi from New York, together with a small group of Orthodox Jews, established the Jewish Defense League (JDL) as a self-ordained, vigilante movement aimed at defending Jewish neighbourhoods in New York City. It was 'concerned with the explicitly particularistic issues of "crime in the streets", "black anti-Semitism", "liberal do-nothing city government" and "changing neighbourhoods"'.¹

Kahane was greatly helped by the official institutions of American Jewry. Later, they all dissociated themselves totally from the vigilante activities of the JDL² but by doing so, they played right into Kahane's hands. The young JDL members, like many other young Americans of the time, needed to revolt against an establishment. It was not only the Blacks who were now their targets, but the Jewish 'establishment' as well. Kahane, well-acquainted with the Jewish cultural milieu, was familiar with all the sensitive chords of Jewish anxiety of the time. He spoke of manifest and latent anti-semitism, and awakened the repressed memories of the Holocaust.³ Having chosen the Jewish establishment as his prime target, he reminded his audience of the complacency of American Jewish leaders about the concentration camps. 'Never again' became the attractive slogan of the movement.

In 1969, the issue of Soviet Jewry became a major subject for the JDL. Russian diplomats were attacked and demonstrations were continually held in front of and inside the offices of Russian agencies.⁴ To his enthusiastic supporters, Kahane, confident of his importance and influence, launched a new gospel of self-transformation: 'The American Jew from now on will become a new person, proud of his origins, capable of defending himself and fully devoted to the cause of his brothers all over the world'.⁵ A Jewish universalistic message of mutual responsibility was formulated and publicized, and with it came action. Although most JDL activities until 1969 included *symbolic* violence permitted by the law, the League was soon involved in actual violence and illegal acts. Following an attack on an antisemitic radio station, JDL members began to be imprisoned. In January 1970, they disrupted a concert of the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra in Brooklyn, and in June almost thirty members were arrested when they invaded the Soviet trading company Amtorg. Many violent anti-Russian activities followed.⁶

The commencement of activities in Israel

On 12 September 1971, Meir Kahane arrived in Israel and announced that

he had come to stay. The reason for his arrival is still not at all clear.⁷ He and his supporters have always maintained that this was a logical and necessary step in the realization of his nationalistic ideology. Indeed, by 1971 Kahane had published *Never Again*, a book in which he talked about a future Holocaust for Diaspora Jews on the one hand, and a future redemption in Israel on the other. But other, less favourable interpretations maintain that by 1971 Kahane had come to a dead end: in the spirit of détente the American administration was by then determined to rein in extreme anti-Soviet activity and the FBI made it clear to Kahane that it had sufficient evidence to send him to prison.⁸ Just prior to his departure from the US, he was given a suspended sentence of five years' imprisonment with five years' probation.⁹ Unready to face the consequent decline of his movement, he decided to leave his followers and emigrate to Israel, seemingly on ideological grounds. Upon his arrival in Israel, where he was warmly welcomed by the media, Kahane stated that he had no intention of becoming involved in national politics or of running for the Knesset but only of devoting himself to education. He wanted to found his own *kiryat* (an educational centre) and was also interested in establishing a kibbutz. Future JDL members would come to Israel for a leadership training course and Jerusalem was to become the international centre for the JDL. Kahane also stated his wish to replace the 'internationalist' orientation of young Israelis with a healthy nationalism.

Meir Kahane was not, however, destined to pursue a career in education. Rather, the Israeli public was soon to find out that the JDL, an extremist American group whose activities it had originally heard of in the press, was now fully operative in Jerusalem. Surrounded by a handful of young American supporters who had followed him to Israel, and by a smaller group of young Russian *émigrés*, Kahane came out on to the streets. In addition to demonstrations against the Soviet Union, Kahane exploited two new issues: Christian missionary activities in Israel and the Black American sect which had settled in Dimona.¹⁰ Though Jews reject the Christian Mission in principle, and consider it to be a manifestation of religious hostility, no serious trouble had ever been generated over this issue. However, moved mainly by his drive for publicity, Kahane was determined to evict the Mission from the country—and to do it noisily. In a similar spirit, Kahane and his followers aggressively demonstrated against the small Black sect which had settled in the southern development town of Dimona in the early 1970s and which claimed to be genuinely Jewish, though it certainly was not. Small and highly isolated, it went unnoticed until Kahane drew attention to it in order to make headlines.

Less than a year after his arrival in Israel, Kahane had focused on what then became his prime target—the Arabs. It should be mentioned that Kahane had agitated against Arab delegations in the United States and against supporters of PLO terrorism long before his arrival in Israel. It was

therefore to be expected that, once in Israel, Kahane would again act upon this issue. In the early 1970s, however, the Arab question was considered a high state matter. Very few Jews settled in Judea and Samaria, and the military regime under Defence Minister Moshe Dayan kept the occupied territories under tight control. Meir Kahane, a practically unknown rabbi who had never served in the army, could not speak with any credibility on Arab affairs, with their serious security implications, and, indeed, Kahane at first did not initiate any provocative action on this issue. It seems that it was only Kahane's sense, in 1972, that the Arab problem was the issue that could keep him alive politically which caused him to turn his attention to it definitively.

In August 1972, JDL leaflets were dropped all over Hebron. The astonished Arab residents learned that Meir Kahane was summoning their mayor, Muhammad Ali Jaabari, to a public show-trial for his part in the massacre of 1929 in which the ancient Jewish community was eliminated and more than sixty of its members were killed. The military authorities were fully aware that this was a very sensitive issue, given that Israel was being carefully watched for its treatment of the inhabitants of the occupied areas. Despite the strict orders to prevent his provocative visit, circulated to all military units in the area, on 27 August, at exactly the announced time of the public trial, Kahane, escorted by two of his followers, appeared in front of the mayor's office in Hebron. Kahane was stopped and sent back to Jerusalem, but the shock waves created in the city by his visit were deeply felt. Of course, no public show-trial has ever been held in Hebron or in any other of the numerous Arab towns and villages Kahane has visited over the years. There have always been police or military units on hand to stop him from provoking confrontation with the local residents. But ever since Hebron, Kahane's reputation for expertise in provocation and headline-hunting, has been well-deserved. Recognizing full well the great impact of these tactics on the Arab population of Judea and Samaria, as well as on Israeli Arabs, Kahane has proved resourceful and imaginative. His message has always been the same: 'the Arabs do not belong here; they must leave'. In this spirit, in 1972 Kahane initiated an organized operation to encourage the Arabs to emigrate.¹¹ Promising full compensation for property, he has developed his theme that only massive Arab evacuation will solve Israel's problems;¹² just as two individuals cannot sit on the same chair, so it is impossible for the two nations, Israeli and Palestinian, to co-exist in the Land of Israel.

While specializing in symbolic action, Kahane did not abstain from involvement in planning acts of violence against Arabs. In 1972, following the terrorist massacre of the Israeli athletes at the Olympic games in Munich, Kahane initiated an ill-fated attempt at sabotaging the Libyan consulate in Rome. For that purpose, he secured the support of Amichai Paglin, a former chief of operations of the Irgun underground during the period of the British mandate. The whole operation was exposed at Ben Gurion air-

port when a small container full of arms and explosives was discovered. Though not arrested in connection with the affair, Kahane, from that time on, has been very careful not to be directly involved in acts of terror himself, while nonetheless verbally fully supporting the acts of Jewish violence and terrorism perpetrated against Arabs.¹³ Some Kach members have nevertheless found themselves in jail occasionally. Kahane himself spent six months there in 1980, following the promulgation of an exceptional administrative decree against him. The details of the charge have never been fully disclosed for reasons of state security, but the prevailing rumour was that a very provocative act of sabotage on the Temple Mount was planned by Kahane and a close associate of his, Baruch Green.¹⁴

Prior to the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, no other political entity fully devoted to the nationalist cause to the point of direct action existed in Israel, Kahane therefore became convinced that, with his nationalist credentials, he could be elected to the Knesset, despite his earlier denial of any intention of becoming a candidate. Following a very skilful electoral campaign, handsomely financed, Kahane polled 12,811 votes, just a few hundred short of the number required to obtain a Knesset seat.

The new political strategy

In 1974, Israeli politics underwent a considerable change, with important repercussions for Kahane's position. Following the Yom Kippur War and the consequent Israeli political earthquake, Gush Emunim (the Block of the Faithful), an energetic and deeply-rooted revitalization movement, became very active.¹⁵ Gush Emunim had everything that Kach and Kahane lacked: it was a cohesive cultural and social entity; it had a skilful, yet modest, collective leadership, as well as an effective membership. A religious movement, it was, however, fully backed by rabbinical authorities—unlike Kach—in addition to being very Israeli in character. In contrast to the rather fringe-like nature of Kahane's followers, it attracted thousands of supporters and hundreds of settlers and potential settlers, who began establishing outposts in Judea and Samaria with or without government permission.¹⁶

In view of the emergence of Gush Emunim and its prestigious and highly publicized activities, Meir Kahane had to reassess his political strategy. He could not join Gush Emunim, since by nature he was only interested in running a one-man show, but neither would he consider quitting politics. His decision was rather to remain active politically, but to the right of Gush Emunim. Now that the job of settling Judea and Samaria was being handled by the Gush, his strategy was to create unbearable conditions for the Arabs in order to provoke their departure. While Gush Emunim never conceived of an Arab evacuation of the occupied territories as an inevitable consequence of its settlement activities,¹⁷ Kach did. Its role was now to subvert the declared intention of Gush settlers to co-exist with the Arabs by instigating local conflicts of an ethnic character. Kahane consequently mov-

ed to Kiryat Arba—the Jewish suburb of Hebron—and, with a violent group of supporters, began making headlines through aggressive provocation.

The Camp David Accords provoked a further development in Kahane's strategy. Menachem Begin, whom he had admired for years as the successor of Vladimir Jabotinsky, now became a 'traitor'.¹⁸ Consequently, the years 1979-81 witnessed many illicit actions in Judea and Samaria and in Jerusalem. The most famous of these took place in April 1982 in Yamit, the capital of the Rafiah salient, which was about to be returned to Egypt. Kahane's followers who took part in the 'Movement against the Retreat from Sinai', which had a strong Gush Emunim colouring, fortified themselves in an underground security shelter and declared in front of the media of the entire world that they intended to commit suicide.¹⁹ Kahane then staged a masterly operation in which he was rushed back from New York by the Israeli government in order to convince his followers not to commit suicide. Negotiations, fully televised, ended the drama peacefully. When some members of the same group later participated in a shooting incident involving an Arab bus in Samaria, Kahane backed them fully and their defence was financed by Kach. A young soldier who, unassociated with Kach, fired a missile at an Arab bus in a Jerusalem neighbourhood was made an honorary member of the League.

It is difficult to judge when and how Kach and Meir Kahane became politically respectable to the point of securing 25,907 votes in the Israeli general election of 1984. In 1977, and again in 1981, Kahane had stood for the Knesset. In these elections he polled only 4,396 (0.2 per cent) and 5,128 (0.3 per cent) votes respectively. At that time, no one believed he would ever win a Knesset seat. What seems to have happened is that Kahane benefited from the increasing polarization of Israeli society along ethnic, social and political lines.²⁰ Many established and respected politicians came to use Kahane-like language. Though no others openly suggested the eviction of all the Israeli Arabs, statements were made by some which could well be construed as supporting such action.²¹ The isolated Kahane now appeared to some on the right as the only man who had always honestly believed in these views. The fact that he was by far the most vocal on this issue, and totally unequivocal, further enhanced his popularity. Socio-economic pressures and a significant growth of a profound anti-Arab sentiment in poor neighbourhoods and development towns also played an important role in his 1984 electoral success. A close reading of the election results clearly suggests that he gained country-wide support.

II: Ideology and Politics

Ideology

In contrast to the leaders of Gush Emunim, to whom he is sometimes compared, Meir Kahane is markedly an ideologue. Ever since the establishment of the Jewish Defense League, Kahane, the former associate editor of the Brooklyn Jewish Press, has been writing extensively. His twelve books and lengthy pamphlets indicate that he was always aware that without a formal ideology and as an unknown rabbi, he could never mobilize support, raise money or attract the attention of the media. While it is true that none of his essays is either original in content or comprehensive in scope, the compendium presents a cohesive political belief system. This system is marked by basic assumptions, usually drawn from selective interpretations of religious authorities, derivative propositions, usually of a general political character, and by operative conclusions. The Revisionist influence of Jabotinsky is very marked, and in the past Kahane was also ready to admit to the influence of the nationalist thinking of Dr Israël Eldad, a well-known right-wing extremist.¹ Emphases in Kahane's writings have greatly changed over the years, but his typical cast of mind has always been the same.

The uniqueness and singularity of the Jewish people

Kahane's fundamental axiom is religious and highly particularistic in character and amounts to a repeated insistence that the Jewish people is unique, singular and holy. No other people or nation has matched it in the past or could do so in the future. The reason is patently clear—this is the only nation chosen by God:

The Jewish people is a unique, distinct and separate people, divinely chosen at Sinai, a religion-nation, transcending the foolishness and danger of shallow secular nationalism. That merely divides without raising up. It is a chosen people, a nation of priests and holy people, whose nationalism and religion are identical and indivisible. Its chosenness is not a racial or national thing, but based on the chosen mission, i.e. it is a people that was given a sacred law, the Torah, and an immutable destiny to live and uphold the Torah so as to serve as a light unto the nations. The observance of the *mitzvot* is the sole reason for Jewish chosenness and Jewish existence . . . All that happened, happens and will happen goes according to a divine plan at the centre of which stands the Jewish people.²

The meaning of this fundamental axiom is that the Jewish people is in possession of a complete system of normative behaviour which is exclusively its own. No respect should be paid to the moral or behavioural norms of other philosophies or nations. In taking this position, Kahane manifestly denies the existence of any normative system which is universally binding. Universalism, whatever its worth, does not concern the Jewish people. And, since the Almighty God of Israel stands behind his people, not only is the Jewish nation morally entitled to its own unique path, but this path is bound to succeed.

This basic axiom of religious singularity may, on its own, be attacked from a humanist, universalist perspective, but it is shared by a wider orthodox constituency, and is not really the defining attribute of Kahane's ideology in particular. This is rather to be found in the specific twist which Kahane gives to the traditional world view, to the emphases which he places on certain aspects of the tradition, and to the very operative conclusions which he alone draws from the sources in response to his particular reading of contemporary events. Thus, he takes it for granted that the world is hostile to the Jew and 'Esau (the Arab) is especially hateful of Jacob (the Jew)'.³ The Jewish people should consequently concern itself solely with its own redemption and there is no sense, in his view, in either being kind to Gentiles or in trying to convince them of the righteousness of the Jews. Among themselves, Jews should stand united, always helping each other.⁴ The world that created Auschwitz cannot be trusted again and Jews must see that Auschwitz should 'never again' be realized.

The sanctity of the Land of Israel and its territorial integrity

The second fundamental axiom of Kahane's ideology is the insistence upon the sanctity of the Land of Israel. Since it goes without saying that every Orthodox Jew adheres to this view, what makes Kahane different are the operational conclusions which he draws from this position, which amounts to one of the most extreme expressions of the Greater Israel position on the inadmissibility of withdrawing from any territories and on the territorial integrity of the State of Israel. According to him, the State of Israel is fully entitled to the Land of Israel and to sovereignty over all of it, as promised in the Bible. The government of Israel should thus see that this sovereignty be immediately extended and not a single thought of its surrender should be permitted: 'There is only one land—the Land of Israel—and not one inch is not ours and not one inch dare be given back'.⁵ According to his latest interpretation, in 1967 God showed his great might by directing from above the victory of the Six Day War. It is consequently a criminal offence of the first degree not to abide by his command.⁶ Jews, according to Kahane, should be ready to die rather than surrender the Land. *Yehareg velo yaavor* ('Be killed but not trespass') is the rule that should govern the case of the 'liberated territories'.⁷ Kahane's position on the territorial question should therefore be

understood to include both a strong religious element and a violent insistence on territorial integrity. Indeed, he further maintains that Israel's national interests dictate that even occupied territories which are not included in the biblical promise may not be returned to the enemy. Only under the strict conditions which imply unconditional surrender, recognition of Judaism's religious superiority and irrevocable readiness for peace, is negotiation over territory permissible.⁸ This all undoubtedly places him among the most extreme of the Greater Israel school.

Messianic redemption

For several years, Meir Kahane's message was far more political than religious and did not include messianic philosophy or millenarian dreams. But ever since the Six Day War, other religious movements in Israel—principally Gush Emunim—have greatly stressed the messianic call.⁹ In the 1970s, talk about the redemption of the Jewish people in this generation became common. In this context, a religious, territorial-maximalist creed could not be considered complete if it did not include a messianic component, and Kahane inserted this into his ideology. According to his present conviction, redemption is imminent. In 1980 he argued that a total national redemption could in fact have already taken place if only the government of Israel would undertake what it should have done a long time ago: namely, immediately annex the occupied territories, expel all 'alien worship' from the Temple Mount, and evict all the 'enemies of the Jews' from the State of Israel. 'Had we acted without considering the Gentile reaction, without fear of what he may say or do, the Messiah would have come right through the open door and brought us redemption.'¹⁰ The only question pending is whether redemption will come willingly and smoothly or whether it is to be forced upon the Jews. Should the Jews not be sufficiently prudent as to understand their religious and national duties, redemption will be forced upon them through great suffering.¹¹ It is for the people of Israel to decide which way to turn.

Democracy and the rule of law

The question of democracy and the rule of law has in the last several years become central to the teaching and especially the preaching of Rabbi Kahane. For many years this was not the case. In the United States, Kahane had nothing to say about democracy and he mostly concentrated on a single issue: Jewish self-defence against ethnic hostility and street hooliganism. Over the years in Israel, however, Kahane has often been accused of being anti-democratic and has had to take an unequivocal stand on the question of democracy, which he has done most clearly in his book *Chok Vaseder Be-Israel* ('Law and Order in Israel').¹² Kahane's position on the issue is that democracy as a value is an alien, Gentile idea. Under certain conditions, it may be a useful political arrangement for Jews, but in that context it must

submit to the laws of the Torah. If the democratically elected government obeys religious laws and the interpretation of Orthodox authorities, then it is admissible, but if it does not, all its laws, regulations and policies are unacceptable.¹³

While already in ideological confrontation with Israeli democracy, it should be stressed that Kahane has not yet developed a philosophy of total delegitimation of Israel's prevailing political system,¹⁴ which disturbs Kahane only by its concrete, erroneous policies. There is, however, one element in his teaching which is not only critical of policy but also of structure and substance: because of his position on the Arabs, Kahane is extremely critical of Israel's Declaration of Independence. He considers this document, which in 1948 promised equal rights to all residents of the state, national and racial origins notwithstanding, to contain a contradiction in terms,¹⁵ because it is impossible to establish in the Land of Israel a state which will be Jewish and at the same time a classical democracy. Should the State of Israel remain democratic, in the long run it is bound to lose its Jewish nature.¹⁶ Since the Arabs have the demographic factor working for them, the loss of the Jewish majority is just a matter of time. The State of Israel, Kahane concludes, can either be Jewish or democratic; and since it is bound to be Jewish, the sooner the Arabs are excluded from the democratic system, the better.

The Arabs

Kahane's *Weltanschauung* is reminiscent of late nineteenth century 'catastrophic Zionism', with a strong emphasis on 'negation of the Diaspora'.

The Arabs are, taken together, the collective entity that, for Kahane, threatens Jewish existence; and the Israeli Arabs (there is no Palestinian nation for Kahane) are a highly explosive time bomb. The Arabs claim the same land as the Jews, refuse to recognize God's biblical prescriptions and would never be ready to settle for less than the whole. This places them in the same position as the native population of Canaan at the time of the Israelite conquest, and all biblical rules and regulations adopted and applied by Joshua against the Canaanites are relevant today.¹⁷ Joshua, Kahane reminds us, sent the Canaanites three letters offering them three alternative courses of action: leave the land, fight for it and bear the consequences or peacefully surrender to the Jews and obtain the status of loyal 'resident strangers'. Any individual Arab is thus welcome to stay provided he fully accepts Jewish sovereignty, as well as the right upon which it is founded. Applying the rules of *Halakha* (written and oral tradition) according to his understanding, Kahane maintains that even in the case of complete submission, full rights of citizenship should not be given to 'strangers'. Only 'strangers' who will obey the seven commandments of 'Noah's sons', pay special taxes and submit to special labour regulations may remain. Follow-

ing the 'kingdom rules' of Maimonides, the 'strangers' must also constantly be 'humiliated and detested'.¹⁸

In his most recent book, *They Must Go*, by far the most radical treatise Kahane has ever composed, he is even more extreme concerning the fate of the Arabs. Fearful of the treacherous nature of even the best of them, he suggests that their permission to stay be limited to one year only. Each year they should resubmit their credentials for examination. A further restriction stressed in the book is that no 'stranger' be allowed to live in Jerusalem, and that their total number be determined in accordance with the state's security requirements.

Upon close examination, it is hardly questionable that the ideology of Kach, as expressed by Meir Kahane, represents by far the most extreme variant of the present radical right in Israel. It is exclusivist and nationalist to the point of racism. Kahane, who began as a follower of the ideology of Jabotinsky, does not now follow him at all.

Kach as a quasi-fascist phenomenon

While a formal presentation of the background and ideology of Kach and its leader is helpful in identifying its place on the ideological map of Israel, only a closer examination of Kach's actual *modus operandi*, its imagery and symbolism, as well as some hidden undercurrents in its history, may locate it accurately on a general comparative political map. Having examined these facets of the Kach phenomenon, it would appear that, from a radical movement of minority self-defence with no comprehensive political ideology, it has gradually evolved into a radical right entity, with many similarities to historical fascist movements. Kach today is a quasi-fascist movement.

Legitimation of violence

In the days of the American JDL, Kahane emphasized the importance of force. One of the pillars of the JDL's operative ideology was the notion of 'Jewish iron'. Kahane, it is true, did not invent either the idea or the metaphor: he adopted it from the ideology of Vladimir Jabotinsky. The expression 'Jewish iron', according to Jabotinsky, meant that in the Diaspora or under foreign rule, Jews were no longer to bow to their oppressors but were called upon to respond to them in kind and with physical force, if necessary.¹⁹ It also meant that the sovereign Jewish state should have a strong army, capable of defending it against all threats. Kahane was so impressed by the notion of 'iron' and the application of physical force for self-defence that he divided the JDL groups in America in two: the *Chaya* groups and the Scholar groups.²⁰ *Chaya* in Hebrew means animal, and the *Chaya* squads were in charge of the use of violence against the League's rivals. In Israel, there was no place for further expression of 'Jewish iron': since 1948, the country has been sovereign and Jabotinsky's notion has been realized in the

Israel Defence Forces. Meir Kahane was apparently not satisfied. Though he did not establish *Chaya* squads in Israel, he maintained that if the state was incapable or unready to react in kind against those who spilt so much as 'one drop of Jewish blood', then it was the duty of individual Israelis to do so. Slowly and without developing a fully-fledged ideology of violence, Kahane took to legitimizing anti-Arab terror, a message fully absorbed and acted upon by his followers.

In 1974 he first came up with the idea of TNT (Hebrew acronym for *Terror Neged Terror*, i.e. Jewish terrorism against Arab terrorism). In *The Jewish Idea*, he suggested that 'a world-wide Jewish anti-terror group' be established and that 'This group must be organized and aided in *exactly the same way as the terrorists are aided by Arab governments*. With a totally serious face, the government of Israel must deny any connection with the group, even while allowing *the same* training bases on its soil as the Arab states allow the terrorists'.²¹ Since the government of Israel was not receptive to the idea, Kahane's followers, and other individuals inspired by the idea, soon started to act on their own. Out of fear of the Israeli police and the very efficient intelligence services, they did not try to establish a genuine terrorist organization, but engaged in occasional anti-Arab atrocities. These usually occurred following Arab terrorist attacks, but by the 1980s no such pretext was needed. Craig Leitner, a Kahane follower, described a typical operation:

One day towards the end of July 1984, I agreed with Mike Gozovsky and Yehuda Richter to operate against the Arabs. We left Kiryat Arba in a hired car, headed towards Jerusalem . . . That night around 23:00, we went to the Neve Yaacov area. Yehuda was driving. Around midnight, we saw an Arab in his twenties walking along the road. I said 'let's stop the car'. I went out and hit the Arab with my fist on the shoulder. I also kicked him. He escaped into the night. We continued to Hebron and it was decided—I don't remember by whom—to burn Arab cars. We had in our car two plastic bottles containing four and a half litres of gasoline. In Hebron Yehuda stopped the car. Mike took the gasoline and poured it under several cars, maybe three. Following the burning of the cars by Yehuda, we moved, not waiting to see what would happen. Dogs were around and I was afraid that they would wake up the neighbours or perhaps bite us and we would get rabies.²²

When asked for his reaction to the activities of Leitner and his friends, Kahane expressed his total approval. He said that he was sorry that they would have to spend years in prison and added that, in his eyes, they were Maccabees. Later, Kahane placed Yehuda Richter, the main suspect in the operation, as number two on his list for the Knesset. Richter was also known for his role as the commander of the 'suicide' squad in the shelter at Yamit.

Anti-alien sentiment and racist symbolism

Kahane's anti-Arab leitmotif has already been discussed. Even as a political stand, it is profoundly radical and exceptional in Israeli terms and no one

else has come up with such a blunt proposition for mass Arab eviction. A close examination of Kahane's popular publications and speeches, however, reveals a deeper layer of animosity and hatred. It shows that, like many movements of the radical right in the United States or Europe, Kach displays a very strong anti-alien sentiment, with heavy racist overtones. The racist propaganda of Kach closely follows other known patterns of racism in its mixture of superiority complex, sexual anxiety and certain elements of an inferiority complex. Portrayed in the manner of other vulgar racist ideologies, the Arabs are seen at one and the same time as both inferior and superior. They are inferior in the sense that all the Gentile nations are, i.e. by not being the chosen people of Abraham. They are superior because their very presence in Jewish neighbourhoods constitutes a great danger. Collectively they pose a political threat of the first degree. 'No amount of compromise will bring us peace with the Arabs. . . . "Hebronization" is what we expect from them . . . It is madness to return anything to an enemy that is sworn to destroy us and will do so if we allow him the slightest opportunity.'²³

The Arabs are not only collectively dangerous; individually they have also developed methods to defile the purity of the nation. They date Jewish girls, sleep with them and even wish to marry them. Kahane's leaflets on these issues are blunt, brutal and highly offensive. In 1979, Kach members talked of establishing 'Jewish honour guards'. Their task was to identify Jewish girls dating Arabs to warn them about the consequences and to intimidate them. In the same spirit, Kahane has suggested enacting laws concerning sexual relations between Jews and Arabs. He proposes that both sides, if guilty, be sentenced to five years in prison. It is not surprising that Renato Yarark, who represented the state against Kahane in court in 1981, argued that the leader of Kach was replicating the Nuremberg laws of the Nazis.²⁴ When asked, Kahane always maintains that he is not a racist, but rather an anti-Arab Jewish nationalist, who is guided by *Halakha*. His interpretation of the *Halakha* is, however, racist. No other Orthodox Jew before Kahane has ever approached the problem in this way.

Propaganda and smear campaign

A typical feature of fascist and quasi-fascist movements is their quick shift from ideology to propaganda and from propaganda to smear campaign. These tactics are employed for their effectiveness and Kach follows the pattern. One can find thoughtful essays by Kahane in which he seriously tries to derive his ideology from the Holy Scriptures and distinguished rabbinical exegesis but also vulgar leaflets whose contents amount to criminal incitement. Kahane has always been aware of the alienated, *déclassé*, impoverished and embittered who could be attracted to his extremism.²⁵ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, he began to address the Sefardi Jews, arguing that, not only was the government doing nothing about the Arabs, but it was deliberately discriminating against Sefardis. According to this line of argument, the

Ashkenazi government had never done enough for the Sefardi immigrants and now it was trying to ruin them economically by spending national money in support of the Arabs at a time of economic crisis. Were the Arabs not constantly subsidized, Jews could live in prosperity—especially Jews from the weaker strata of the population. Arabs, who do not serve in the army and do not, according to Kahane, pay sufficient taxes, are shown to be receiving the same benefits from the state as Jews.²⁶

Kahane knows his audience. The Sefardi Jews have indeed suffered in the past from cultural discrimination and some of them have developed a genuine anti-Ashkenazi sentiment. But Kahane articulates their sentiments in a way that no one has done before. There is now said to be a 'conspiracy of the Ashkenazi establishment to help the Arabs instead of the Sefardi Jews'.²⁷ The Ashkenazi government does not care about values like paternalism and chastity, and it is bound to destroy them. It allows Arabs into Jewish society and makes it possible for Arab youngsters to seduce poor Sefardi Jewish girls. Playing on the sensitivities of some in his audience, Kahane goes to development towns and poor neighbourhoods and tells lurid stories. He reminds his audience that in their native countries, such as Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, no daughter of theirs had dated Arab boys. But now, in independent Israel, the dream of generations of suffering Jews, they do—so he alleges.²⁸

Evolution of a personality cult

When the JDL was established in America, it was a collective venture with several New York Jews co-operating to found the movement under the inspiration of Meir Kahane. In 1969 and 1970, while it was already clear that Kahane was the ideologue, the newsmaker and the leader, he was still nevertheless accountable to others in the JDL. In Israel this has changed. The JDL there is his own product. People of some theoretical and practical weight, like Yoel Lerner and Yossi Dayan, have joined in the past, but Kahane would never let them decide anything. And thus, gradually, with no theoretical insistence upon the 'leader principle', Kahane became the sole ideologue, the only decision-maker, the major speaker and the treasurer. He makes all statements, as well as policy decisions. In 1981 Yossi Dayan, the Director-General of the movement, wrote in a JDL question-and-answer brochure:

Is Kach a one man movement?

Kach is not a one man movement. Rabbi Kahane is the movement's head and ideologist. At his side there stands a very skilful and reliable team which is fully devoted to the completion of the hard work under the worst conditions. However, what distinguishes Kach from other political movements is its perfect fitness for the idea and the principle. In this way a movement that works like a 'single individual' was created. The Kach movement is a monolithic body in which no divisions or splits are possible. All of us agree that Rabbi Kahane expresses the genuine Jewish idea and all see eye-to-eye the reality in the country and the way to solve the hard problems.²⁹

Several months later, Mr Dayan was forced to leave Kach, following a difference of opinion with Kahane. Today, especially after his electoral success, Kahane is worshipped within the movement. Nothing happens without his consent. Nothing is said in the name of Kach without mentioning the name of Meir Kahane.

All of the features discussed here add up to the reality that Kach today is not just another party of the Israeli radical right. It is a quasi-fascist entity in thought and action.

Future trends

There can be no doubt about Kach's achievement in the 1984 elections. Kahane succeeded in winning the electoral support of 26,000 citizens and a Knesset seat. Public opinion polls conducted since the elections have indicated growing support for Kach. Recent estimates give Kach 9 per cent of the vote if the elections were held now.³⁰ In June 1985, the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem published an opinion poll conducted among 15-18 year-old Israeli high school students which found that 42 per cent supported Kahane's views, while 11.3 per cent said they would vote for him were elections to be held then.³¹ Given present trends, it is unlikely that the Kach phenomenon will vanish from the Israeli parliamentary scene. Not only should cultural and ideological trends, which are significant in themselves, be stressed but also political and economic ones. Kahane is greatly sustained by the growth of internal Arab terrorism, as well as by Israeli Arab support for PLO ideology. The more such support is expressed, the more people turn to the catastrophic interpretation of Kahane. Israel's present economic crisis also works for the leader of Kach. Many of his supporters come from areas of high unemployment. In addition to their anti-Arab chauvinism, fuelled by Kahane over the years, present uncertainty and severe anxiety about Arab competition play an important role in establishing their allegiance to Kach.

While present trends seem to support the prognosis of a certain growth in Kach's following, it is important to identify weak points in the movement's position. Three of these stand out: Kahane's isolation, Kach's legal vulnerability and the challenge of Gush Emunim.

Despite its success, Kach was, and remains, a one-man show. Kahane has never cultivated or wanted a second-generation leadership. Were Kahane to be removed from the scene through illness, it is very likely that the movement would cease to exist. It appears that few social ties or common commitments bind Kahane's various strange and alienated supporters. The loose structure of the local branches could very easily dissolve. Since no large financial sums are involved, Kach without Kahane would most probably disappear. Not only is Kahane isolated, but today he is also pursued by the government, the Knesset and the law enforcement agencies. Though his ideology and intentions were known long before 1984, it is only after his electoral victory that a general consensus regarding the need to stop him

through legislation has emerged. The Knesset House Committee has already restricted Kahane's parliamentary immunity and an amendment to the Fundamental Law on the Knesset was recently introduced which forbids a party with incitement to racism among its objectives or activities from participating in Knesset elections.³² It is highly likely that at least some of this legislation will be effective and, if so, much of Kahane's uniqueness and appeal may be lost. A restricted Kahane, kept away from the Arabs and isolated from the media, is bound to have a reduced impact.

Of no less danger to Kach's political future is the emerging opposition of Gush Emunim and its supporters in the existing political parties of Tehiya, Morasha, the NRP and even the Likud. Until 1984, the extreme religious and nationalist camp did not consider Kahane to be a challenge. No effort was made to curtail his influence in *yeshivot*, settlements and the other strongholds of this camp. This is no longer the case. Electoral strength in Israel translates into power and money and there is little readiness to share them with Kahane. Considering the financial and organizational weakness of Kach and the growing outside pressures, it will have to struggle very hard in order to survive politically.

Finally, the phenomenon of Kach should also be seen in a historical and comparative perspective. Many Western democracies today are experiencing occasional waves of quasi-fascist activity. In most cases the movements involved, if they do not create soundly-based elite groups and efficient organizations, are transient phenomena. Their situation greatly depends on changing conditions such as national moods and economic crises. Kach seems to fit this pattern and it seems reasonable to suggest that, in the long run, it will lose much of its appeal and most of its political power.

Notes

Part I

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- 1 Janet L. Dolgin, *Jewish Identity and the JDL* (Princeton, NJ 1977), 16.
- 2 Ibid., 17-18.
- 3 See Meir Kahane, *Never Again: A Program for Survival* (New York 1972).
- 4 Dolgin, 33-4.
- 5 Kahane, *Never Again*.
- 6 Dolgin, 36-7.
- 7 Dolgin, 41.
- 8 This information is based on an interview (25 January 1984) with Yair Kotler, a journalist, whose book, *Heil Kahane* (Hebrew), was published this year in Tel Aviv.
- 9 Dolgin, 38.
- 10 Ehud Sprinzak, *The Origins of the Politics of Delegitimation in Israel, 1967-73* (Jerusalem 1973), 26.
- 11 Ibid., 26.
- 12 Meir Kahane, *The Jewish Idea* (Jerusalem 1974), 13-15.

- 13 Kahane has been arrested in Israel several times, mostly for provocative acts and confrontation with the police.
- 14 *Yediot Ahronot*, 24 May 1980.
- 15 See Ehud Sprinzak, 'Gush Emunim: the tip of the iceberg', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, fall 1981.
- 16 Dany Rubinstein, *On the Lord's Side: Gush Emunim* (Tel Aviv 1982), chapter 5.
- 17 Sprinzak, 'Gush Emunim', 37-8.
- 18 Itzhak Ben Ner and Alex Ansky, 'Medinat Kach', interview with Kahane, *Yediot Ahronot*, 21 January 1981.
- 19 *Maariv*, 16 April 1982.
- 20 See David B. Capitanchik, 'A Guide to the Israeli General Election 1984', *IJA Research Reports*, no. 8, July 1984, 4.
- 21 For instance, a notorious reference by General Raphael Eitan, when he was Israel's Chief of Staff, to the Arabs as 'drugged roaches' was understood by many as a Kahane-like statement.

Part II

- 1 Interview with Meir Kahane, 18 April 1973.
- 2 Meir Kahane, *The Jewish Idea* (Jerusalem 1974), 5.
- 3 Meir Kahane, *Netzah Israel Venizthono* (The Glory of Israel and Her Victory) (The Jewish Defense League 1973), 10.
- 4 Meir Kahane, *Never Again: A Program for Survival* (New York 1972), chapter 11.
- 5 Kahane, *The Jewish Idea*, 13.
- 6 Meir Kahane, *Al Haemuna Vehageula* (On Faith and Redemption) (Institute for Jewish Ideas, 1980), 52-3.
- 7 Ibid., 57.
- 8 Ibid., 51.
- 9 Tsvi Raanan, *Gush Emunim* (Tel Aviv 1980), chapter 5.
- 10 Kahane, *Al Haemuna Vehageula*, 59.
- 11 Meir Kahane, *Bamidbar* (In the Wilderness) (Kach Movement, n.d.), 8.
- 12 Meir Kahane, *Chok Vaseder Be-Israel* (Law and Order in Israel) (Kach Movement, 1977).
- 13 Ibid., 8.
- 14 For a discussion of the political meaning of delegitimation, see Ehud Sprinzak, *The Origins of the Politics of Delegitimation in Israel, 1967-1972* (Jerusalem 1973), 2-7.
- 15 Meir Kahane, *They Must Go* (New York 1981), chapter 4.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Kahane, *Al Haemuna Vehageula*, 68.
- 18 Ibid., 72.
- 19 Janet L. Dolgin, *Jewish Identity and the JDL* (Princeton, NJ 1977), 44-5.
- 20 Ibid., chapter 3.
- 21 Kahane, *The Jewish Idea*, 14.
- 22 Quoted in Nadav Shragai, 'Yoztim lepeula' (Going for the action), *Haaretz*, 27 November 1984.
- 23 Kahane, *The Jewish Idea*, 13. 'Hebronization' refers to the massacre of Jews in Hebron in 1929.
- 24 See *Haolam Haze*, 23 September 1984, 24.
- 25 Interview with Kahane, 18 April 1983.
- 26 See an interview with Kahane's supporters by Eli Tavor, 'In Beit Shemesh, they went with Kahane', *Yediot Ahronot*, 17 August 1984.
- 27 Kach leaflet (n.d.).
- 28 Based on interview with Yair Kotler, 25 January 1985.
- 29 Yossef Dayan, *Kach Program* (Kach brochure, n.d.).
- 30 Pori opinion poll, published in *Haaretz*, 2 August 1985.
- 31 See *Le Monde*, 27 June 1985.
- 32 *Haaretz*, 1 August 1985.

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