

‘Not One Inch of Retreat’: The Transnational Jewish Far Right, 1929-1996

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Abstract

“‘Not One Inch of Retreat’: The Transnational Jewish Far Right, 1929-1996,” investigates the history of the far-right Zionist movement in the U.S. and Israel-Palestine across the twentieth century. It explores the interwar origins of the transnational Jewish far right’s ideology and praxis, showing how this period shaped the movement’s formal politics and its ideas about nationhood, gender, land, and colonialism, as well as some of its adherents’ tendency toward fascism. The dissertation also considers how the movement adapted to the realities of sovereignty, and then to the longer-term pursuit of political power, exploring how the trappings of statehood at first undermined, and then revitalized, the transnational Jewish far right as it sought to capitalize on moments of political and social instability in both countries. This project argues that a specific mechanism led to the greatest advances in the far right’s vision: a cycle of crisis and victory, whereby a perceived setback to the movement’s aims sparked grassroots mobilization, radicalization, and violence, ending each time with cooptation by the Israeli state.

This dissertation also examines overlaps between far-right and centrist streams of Zionism, ultimately arguing that far from being an anomaly, the Jewish far right is deeply embedded into the history of Jewish national politics—and that, despite its ultranationalism and fixation on territory, it is, in fact, a profoundly internationalist movement. In particular, it assesses the interdependence of the movement in each country, and explores how the transnational relationship altered over the decades in response to changing geopolitical circumstances; shifting domestic and international sociopolitical concerns; and, above all, the Jewish far right’s steady progress from the margins to the mainstream.

For Emilienne, Kurt, Mona, and all the other grandparents we only know through stories

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Introduction

In the fall of 2015, I began working on the English-language desk of an Israeli newsroom, right at the start of an intense period in Israel-Palestine. Violence on both sides of the Green Line had, as it customarily does, begun spiking from its already high baseline, making the newsroom a chaotic—and distressing—place to work. Yet amid the immediate tumult of that moment, a related set of stories was, in the background, gathering steam. A couple of months earlier, in July 2015, a horrifying arson attack by far-right Jewish settlers on a Palestinian home in the northern West Bank killed three members of the Dawabsheh family, including an eighteen-month-old baby, leaving behind an orphaned four-year-old boy as the sole survivor. The incident had led to heightened media interest in the so-called hilltop youth, a loosely affiliated movement of young, ultranationalist, religiously fundamentalist, and borderline-anarchist Jewish settlers that had begun coalescing in the late 1990s and early 2000s in response to fears of land-for-peace deals at the tail end of the Oslo era. The Dawabsheh family’s killers, who were arrested not long after the murders, belonged to this movement; around the same time they were taken in by the Israeli authorities, other hilltop youth were put in administrative detention for fear that they were planning further attacks—and on the suspicion that they had been involved in the Dawabshehs’ deaths. Shortly after, in November 2015, the killers of Muhammad Abu Khdeir—a 16-year-old

Palestinian from Shuafat, East Jerusalem, whom a small group of religious right-wing settlers had kidnapped and burned alive during the unrest of summer 2014—were convicted; at around the same time, a separate trial ended in the conviction of three Jewish religious far-right settlers for an arson attack on a mixed Jewish-Palestinian school in Jerusalem. Not long before, other hilltop youth members had been arrested for setting fire to a Jerusalem church.

The media was, in other words, awash in stories relating to Jewish terrorism. It was easy to feel as if this was an unprecedented moment of acceleration and expansion in Jewish far-right violence and mobilization: the professed shock with which commentators addressed these ongoing trials and investigations, and the quasi-anthropological angle journalists took in reporting on the hilltop youth and their peers, both gave these stories the appearance of novelty, while belying the ways in which this movement was not quite as marginalized as the Israeli authorities—and commentariat—insisted it was. Yet tucked away at the edges of these reports were clear indicators that these acts, and their perpetrators, had deep lineages stretching decades into the past; that those lineages were profoundly connected to the Israeli mainstream, and to the history of Zionism; and that was a transnational dimension to the movement that had been fundamental to its development and growing influence.

For one thing, at least two of those arrested by the Israeli security services on charges relating to far-right Jewish terrorism were the grandsons of men who had themselves been involved in Jewish terrorism in Israel-Palestine in the 1980s. One of them, a minor whose name was kept out of the press by gag order due to his young age, has a grandfather who was in the Jewish Underground, a Jewish terrorist group that had formed out of the settler elite in the late 1970s. The group carried out several high profile attacks against Palestinians, plotted to blow up

the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, and finally saw its members arrested as they were in the process of trying to bomb Palestinian buses. Following their arrest and conviction, the group received a groundswell of support in both Israel and the U.S., and were all released early in acts of clemency granted by the President of Israel.

The other arrestee, Meir Ettinger, is the grandson of Meir Kahane, a Brooklyn-born extremist rabbi who launched the Jewish Defense League in New York in the late 1960s before fleeing his legal troubles and moving to Israel. Once there, he established Kach, originally billed as the Israeli arm of the JDL but which quickly evolved into a political party with which, after several failed attempts, Kahane finally got elected to the Israeli parliament in 1984. Despite his limited parliamentary success, Kahane inspired a devout following in both the U.S. and Israel, weaving together a potent ideological blend of ethnic chauvinism, religious fundamentalism, ultranationalism, and racial and male supremacism that appealed to a diverse array of followers on both sides of the Atlantic. Such was his impact that his worldview came to be known as “Kahanism”—and, as was made clear in the spate of Jewish terror attacks in 2014 and 2015, it continued to inspire anti-Palestinian violence decades later. The hilltop youth had a Kahanist outlook; so did many of the far-right Jewish terrorists involved in other assaults and hate crimes, even if they were not part of the hilltop youth.

Two sets of questions began nagging at me as I continued reading and writing about the trials and convictions of these far-right Jewish ideologues. The first was about the power and influence of their movement: while it was clear that the “bad apples” argument used to dismiss violent far-right agitators did not hold up against a clear-eyed examination of Israeli history, how close were they to the Israeli- and American-Jewish mainstream? And had they started at the

margins and moved their way to the center, or did the center move toward them? A further question was about political genealogy: many of these young extremists had drawn their inspiration from Kahane, how had Kahane arrived at his understanding of Jewish identity and politics? Where had he adopted the credo of righteous Jewish violence, and when? And why did he strike such a chord in two separate countries with vastly different social, political, and cultural norms, across several decades during which those norms shifted dramatically in each place?

The second set of questions was about how it was that specifically an American immigrant had had such a lasting—and devastating—impact on Israeli politics. Does Kahane’s long shadow over Israeli politics and society tell us more about the society he came from or the one he went to? Was this about a specific moment in time in each country that Kahane was able to exploit to transformative ends, or about longer-term processes and sentiments he simply accelerated? Was he as much of a marginal phenomenon as his American and Israeli critics usually insisted he was, or was he tapping into something more fundamental about the communities in which he was embedded? Was the genuinely transnational movement he headed at the time of his death an outlier, or was he simply building on what had come before? And why, more than thirty years after Kahane was assassinated in New York, were young Israelis born after his death still in thrall to his teachings—so much so that they were driven to murder, maim, and destroy in their honor?

This dissertation attempts to address these questions, while setting Kahane and the movement he inspired in the longer history of Jewish far-right thought and action. At the heart of this project is an understanding of the Jewish far right as an explicitly transnational movement—one whose diasporic and nation-state arms are locked into a symbiotic and mutually dependent

relationship. Although the Jewish far right is dispersed across many diasporic communities, I have chosen to focus on the relationship between the American-Jewish and Israeli far right: not only because the Jewish community in the U.S. is the largest outside Israel, but also because it is, as a result of its size, the site of the greatest outreach by Israeli counterparts, and because the U.S. is Israel's staunchest and most powerful ally. As this dissertation will explore, these dynamics have had a profound impact on the development of the transnational Jewish far right over the decades, particularly in the last third of the twentieth century.

Historiography

The story of the transnational Jewish far right across a broad sweep of the twentieth century has not previously been told. Parts of it, such as the movement Kahane generated and the origins of organizational right-wing Zionism, are well known, and are dispersed primarily across two historiographies: that on American Jewry, and that on the Israeli right and its pre-state antecedents. Yet while both literatures provide important narratives on the American- and Israeli-Jewish far right, there is a degree of separation between the two fields which has prevented a cohesive story of the transnational Jewish far right from emerging. Equally, both literatures contain distinct gaps regarding how gender (of which more below), political economy, religion, and race intersect in Jewish far-right ideology. This dissertation seeks to integrate those strands, while exploring how, at times, they brought about moments of clear consensus between the Jewish far right and the mainstream in both countries.

The early decades of the Jewish far right have received intermittent attention from scholars, although the literature has grown over the past two decades as academics have sought

out the roots of Israeli politics' increasing rightward trend in the twentieth century. Thus have Daniel Heller's *Jabotinsky's Children* (2017), Dan Tamir's *Hebrew Fascism in Palestine* (2018), and Peter Bergamin's *The Making of the Israeli Far Right* (2020), for example, zero in on leading men in the Revisionist movement to explore how they were influenced by their intellectual and political environment; how they brought that to bear on their interpretation of Zionism; and the impact that had on the development of Zionist ideology and action. Other monographs, including Ami Pedahzur's *The Triumph of the Israeli Radical Right* (2012) (which he positions as a *de facto* follow-up to Ehud Sprinzak's 1991 text *The Ascendance of the Israeli Radical Right*), and Colin Shindler's *The Rise of the Israeli Right* (2015), examine Revisionism's early years as part of a broader survey of the Israeli-Jewish far right, while reaching different conclusions about exactly how right-wing their central subjects were. And still another, smaller, branch of the literature focuses on Revisionist Zionism in the U.S., seeking to uncover the American setting's influence on far-right Zionism while, in some instances, apparently setting out to try and rehabilitate the legacy of what were—and still are—considered terrorist, or terrorist-supporting, groups.¹

These studies have done much to illuminate the beliefs and praxis of far-right Zionist groups and individuals in Europe and Mandate Palestine, and, to a lesser extent, in the U.S. However, the longer-range studies noted above that span most of the twentieth century do not, except for occasional references, factor in the international dimensions of the Jewish far right,

¹ See, for example, Rafael Medoff, *Militant Zionism in America: The Rise and Impact of the Jabotinsky Movement in the United States, 1926-1948* (Tuscaloosa, AL: Alabama University Press, 2002); Judith Tydor Baumel, *The 'Bergson Boys' and the Origins of Contemporary Zionist Militancy*, tr. Dena Ordan (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005); Joanna Saidel, "Revisionist Zionism in America: The campaign to win American public support, 1939-1948," PhD diss. (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, 1994).

focusing instead almost exclusively on its presence in Israel. And even the rare exception to this rule, such as Sara Yael Hirschhorn's monograph, *City on a Hilltop: American Jews and the Israeli Settler Movement* (2017), centers the transnational relationship but stops short of fully investigating right-wing Jewish political thought and action, particularly that in the U.S. Indeed, while the book focuses on the contributions of American Jews to the settlement project, and considers which aspects of U.S. political culture might have fostered their activism, its central premise is that American Jews' dedication to the settlement project is rooted in a legacy of Jewish liberal activism in the U.S. civil rights movement. The U.S.-centered studies, meanwhile, revolve around the pre-state era; this is a natural periodization, but one that nonetheless occludes the continuities from the origins of far-right Zionism to its relative "wilderness" years in the early decades of the state, and then to its exponential strengthening from the final quarter of the twentieth century onward.

This disconnect between the American and Israeli literatures on the Jewish far right is also doubtless due to a degree of exceptionalism at play in both fields. The historiography of both countries, as well as the social and political narratives they draw from and contribute to, frequently present themselves as incomparable and uniquely unique (allowing for the paradox of Israel's self-perception as a European country, and its actual status as a Middle Eastern country). The tendency toward exceptionalism has created a gap this dissertation seeks to address by engaging with a further, somewhat more theoretical field: that on the far right and fascism as political forms and ideologies, which offers critical frameworks for assessing and understanding the various manifestations of Jewish far-right thought in the U.S. and Israel-Palestine. There is a conspicuous lack of texts that place the Jewish far right in direct conversation with its non-

Jewish counterparts and, consequently, very few works that consider the possibility of a specifically Jewish mode of fascism. There are a few reasons that Jewish far-right movements are largely absent from this literature: firstly, because the field overwhelmingly deals with movements that arise from the hegemonic group, thus excluding far-right Jewish groups in the diaspora; secondly, because it remains, understandably, controversial to place Jewish individuals and groups into conversation with ideologies responsible for the destruction of European Jewry; and thirdly, because the area studies-minded approach of the historiography of fascism and the far right is not suited to address Israel-Palestine—which, as mentioned above, remains something of a geopolitical anomaly. Although I do not propose that fascism is an automatic or ever-present feature of the Jewish far right, several of the organizations I will examine—for example, Betar, the JDL, and Kach—have demonstrably fascist characteristics, as this dissertation discusses.

Geography and periodization aside, a further major (and even more invisibilized) lacuna in the historiography on the Jewish far right is gender. This is not to say that women, and men's thoughts on and treatment of them, are entirely absent from the literature: indeed, there are some outstanding examples of what is possible when the Jewish far right is interrogated through a gendered lens.² Yet we lack a sustained assessment of how ideas about gender roles, and about masculinity and femininity and the positive and negative traits associated with them, factored into the ideology of a Zionist far right that was trying to define itself in opposition to heavily

² See, for example, Lihi Ben Shitrit, *Righteous Transgressions: Women's Activism on the Israeli and Palestinian Religious Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); Tamar El-Or and Gideon Aran, "Giving Birth to a Settlement: Maternal Thinking and Political Action of Jewish Women on the West Bank," *Gender and Society* 9, no. 1 (February, 1995): 60-78; and Tamara Neuman, *Settling Hebron: Jewish Fundamentalism in a Palestinian City* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

gendered antisemitic stereotypes during the interwar period and beyond—even as aspects of its aesthetic and ideological output reflected a clear internalization of those same antisemitic characterizations. This dissertation does not feature a carved-out “gender chapter,” but rather seeks to consistently reinsert the gendered dimensions of far-right Jewish thought at key moments, when it drove new modes of far-right activism and rhetoric. It also strives to underline how, at various junctures, ideas and fears surrounding gender formed connective tissue between “mainstream” and far-right Zionism. My intention here is not to suggest that there is no daylight between these two camps, but rather to place them in conversation with one another and to push back on the idea that far-right Zionism is an aberration or latter-day phenomenon, rather than being deeply rooted in the origins of Zionism as a political movement. My other goal is to show both that, as with most right-wing nationalisms, gender is a constitutive element of far-right Zionist thought and action; and, relatedly, that there is a deeply assimilationist aspect to the transnational Jewish far right, from its ideas about masculinity and militarism to its pursuit of a kind of geopolitical normativity and historical rationalization that is profoundly at odds with the millennia of diasporic Jewish experience. These two dynamics are deeply interwoven at the inception of this story and persist throughout it, with early far-right Zionist thinkers and activists frequently given to gendering the land of Palestine as female while calling to conquer the country through violence, and adopting a martial aesthetic combined with a colonial approach to settling the land and—both physically and conceptually—doing away with its native inhabitants. All of this context is essential to understanding the early Jewish far right’s ideological development, and how and why those ideas manifested consistently—while adapting in response

to changing norms and cultural codes—as the movement grew over the course of the twentieth century.

Chapter by chapter

The dissertation begins with the institutionalization of the American-Jewish far right in 1929, when Betar—the youth movement of the far-right Zionist Revisionist movement, founded by Vladimir Jabotinsky and some of his associates in Riga in 1923—opened an office in New York, heralding the establishment of the transnational Jewish far right as part of its staggered inception across Europe, Palestine and the U.S prior to World War II. That was also the year a march to the Western Wall in Jerusalem, organized by a particularly hardline Betar faction, provided the spark that pushed growing intercommunal tension in Palestine over the edge: the backlash devolved into a week of bloodletting that left hundreds of Jews and Arabs dead, including a massacre in Hebron that took the lives of dozens of Jews and drove out the rest of the city’s community, an incident that continues to drive far-right rhetoric and activism today. The dissertation concludes in 1996 with the election of Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister, at the head of the Likud party—the institutional descendant of the Revisionist movement. This concluding event both reasserted Israel’s steady rightward trend begun with Menachem Begin’s election in 1977, and announced the arrival of a new political era in which Jewish far-right ideology went mainstream—in part by coopting Jewish far-right movements.

The first chapter, “A Determined End,” investigates the origins of the transnational Jewish far right, examining its ideological and organizational roots and highlighting how the interwar period shaped its political outlook. In particular, it considers how far-right Jewish

thinkers adopted and adapted ideas from the societies in which they lived, weaving in contemporary ideas about nationhood, gender, and land, while applying a broad colonial framework to their drive for statehood—all of which laid the ideological groundwork for future iterations of the far-right movement. This chapter also explores the fascist dimension of early Jewish far-right thought and aesthetics, while emphasizing how, despite these tendencies, far-right Zionist activists and advocates became adept at creating messaging for mainstream audiences—above all in the United States.

The chapter stretches from the late 1920s to the late 1940s, looking in particular at the U.S. arms of the Revisionist groups and offshoots Betar, the New Zionist Organization, and the Irgun, all of which strove to raise funds and awareness for their counterparts in Palestine and Europe. These groups, while taking slightly different approaches and having varying (but overlapping) mandates, shared a few common aims: primarily, the establishment of a Jewish state on both sides of the River Jordan, a goal and ideology commonly termed “territorial maximalism”; and, secondarily, the formation of a Jewish army and, as the Nazis rose to power, the rescue of European Jews. Underlying these goals were core shared ideas surrounding the shame of exile and the need to redeem the Jewish nation through both statehood and masculinization, which were understood as interdependent processes; a belief in the primacy of the state and in the unity of the nation on the grounds of shared blood and religion (even when the proponents of these ideas were secular); a virulent hatred for communism and the wider left; and, in significant parts of the Revisionist movement, a glorification of youth, violence, militarism, aestheticized politics, and the subordination of individual desire to the collective will.

In this, these streams of Revisionism cleaved closely to fascist politics, a categorization I will discuss further below.

Alongside a careful assessment of these ideologies, this chapter surveys intra-Jewish communal politics in Europe, Palestine, and the U.S. in the late 1920s, before charting the rise of the U.S. Jewish far right leading up to World War II and into the fight for Jewish statehood. In particular, it looks at some of the key figures in Revisionist circles at this time—including Jabotinsky, Menachem Begin, Hillel Kook (also known as Peter Bergson), and Benzion Netanyahu—to explore how they articulated Revisionist ideology, and how they attempted to agitate both the American-Jewish community and the wider American public. Much of this exploration involves discussion of the propaganda materials produced by the various Revisionist groups in the U.S., as well as internal memos, letters, and reports, along with periodicals aimed at the organizations' memberships, mostly drawn from the Jabotinsky Institute Archives in Tel Aviv, the National Library of Israel and the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem, and the American Jewish Historical Society and YIVO archives in New York City. Chapter one also spends time in Mandate Palestine, surveying the allegiances and rivalries among far-right Jewish militias there, while considering the burgeoning transnational nature of the Jewish far right during the wartime and pre-state period—a relationship that, though at times tense, was marked by its symbiotic nature and clear understanding of roles, responsibilities, and aims, helped along by a clarity of purpose. This chapter also, by focusing on Betar, shows the genesis of the Kach movement—both by considering Kahane's involvement with Betar as a youth activist, and by exploring how it straddled two vastly different political cultures.

The second chapter, “A Road Through the Wilderness,” covers the late 1940s to the mid-to-late-1960s, predominantly focusing on the immediate post-statehood period when the transnational Jewish far right found itself in a moment of profound—and often fraught—transition. It focuses on the movement’s stuttering transition to realities of statehood, in which the Jewish far right paradoxically had both more and less power than ever before: it had gained the trappings of sovereignty, while also finding itself frozen out of the newly-created levers of political power. This chapter explores how, in being partly a victim of its own success—winning the long-fought battle for a state, even if on less land than it desired—the transnational Jewish far right was forced into playing a longer game, learning how to build and wield political power while struggling to adhere to its core beliefs.

The chapter draws on post-1948 newsletters, correspondence, meeting minutes, and newspaper advertisements placed by Revisionist Zionist organizations, which show how the state’s creation robbed groups such as Betar and the Irgun of their *raison d’être*, even as it brought the legitimacy of state power to some of the ideology—whether exclusionist, expulsionist, or expansionist—that those groups and their members had been espousing since the 1930s. The American-Jewish far right suffered an abrupt drop-off in funds, personnel, and mobilization, especially with the return of most of its leadership to the Middle East, while the new far-right Israeli parties—above all Herut, which Begin formed out of the Irgun—struggled to break Labor Zionism’s stranglehold over parliamentary politics and the country’s institutions. U.S. groups, particularly Betar USA, struggled to remain relevant as a diasporic entity whose ultimate aim was, now, the “negation of the exile,” which played out through ultimately failed

initiatives such as a short-lived and limited “*aliyah*” and settlement project.³ In addition to the uncertainties of the post-war and post-statehood period, the American-Jewish far right also found itself up against a shifting domestic environment, in which many Jews were at once more comfortable and stable than ever as they continued assimilating into the American middle-class, while also being in the crosshairs of proliferating Cold War paranoia that blended virulent anti-communism with latent antisemitism. This dynamic generated a persistent aura of suspicion around American Jews, whose institutional leadership responded by going all-in on the anti-communist assault—a drive that brought about a significant consensus between the mainstream community and the far right. In Israel, meanwhile, the far right’s exclusion from political power contributed to the formation of grassroots far-right groups such as the radical religious Brit Hakanaim, which though short-lived were a preview of the kinds of activism and protest that would surge in the wake of 1967’s Six-Day War.

Amid these struggles on both sides of the Atlantic, the transnational relationship itself became dysfunctional and at times tense, as the American arm of the movement sought to maintain its ties to its Israeli counterparts and bristled against Begin’s attitude that the movement’s focus should be almost exclusively on domestic Israeli politics. This chapter tracks the back and forth between the American and Israeli wings of the Jewish far right, following how its personnel argued, negotiated, and changed tack as they sought to expand their domestic influence while trying to resurrect the more symbiotic relationship that had emerged during

³ Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “The Zionist Return to the West and the Mizrahi Jewish Perspective,” in *Orientalism and the Jews*, eds. Ivan Davidson Kalman and David J. Penslar (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 167. “*Aliyah*” is the Hebrew word for Jewish immigration to Israel; it literally means “rise” or “ascent,” referring to the implied spiritual ascent Jews make when they go to live in Israel.

World War II. The chapter concludes with the 1967 war, which resuscitated and galvanized the transnational Jewish far right, restoring its sense of purpose while injecting a strong current of messianism into the movement, setting the stage for the coming political dominance of the Israeli far right and the parallel proliferation of far-right protest groups that helped reawaken the original maximalist dream.

Chapter three, “An Everlasting Dominion,” covers the mid-1960s to the late-1970s, focusing on the rise of Meir Kahane and tracking the wider revitalization and expansion of the Jewish far right in both countries. It focuses on the development of the cycle of crisis and victory which would, from this period onward, prove pivotal to the transnational far right’s growing power, and which introduced what would become a consistent trend of the Israeli state collaborating with, and eventually coopting, parts of the grassroots far-right movement. This chapter also, as does chapter one, looks at how—in this transitional moment for the movement—the Jewish far right took sociopolitical concerns, ideas, and aesthetics from its environment, adapted them, and incorporated them into its own ideology and messaging. The chapter further assesses how the discrete, yet complementary, roles of the Jewish far right in the United States and Israel-Palestine started to develop greater clarity in this period, after the confusion of the immediate post-statehood era, and as formal power for the movement loomed ever closer.

This chapter pays close attention to the environment in which Kahane rose to prominence and formed the Jewish Defense League, with the vociferous anti-communism of the Cold War, the emergence of identity politics amid the rise of the civil rights movement, and concerns over “Jewish continuity”—chiefly expressed as opposition to intermarriage—all fueling his developing political ideology, while also producing areas of overlap between his chief concerns

and those of the American-Jewish establishment. This chapter also explores the fascist dimension of Kahane's thought and action, including in the inspiration he drew from Betar. Like other members of the American-Jewish far right before him, Kahane drew on American tropes even as he scorned the trappings of "regular" American-Jewish life, while infusing his politics with a strand of apocalypticism that warned of an impending Holocaust—whether through assimilation or antisemitism. His move to Israel-Palestine just a few years after he founded the JDL came as that country was seeing its own grassroots far-right groups spring up, most notably the religious-Zionist settler outfit Gush Emunim and—from within that group—the terrorist Jewish Underground. Kahane, too, formed his own group, which rapidly morphed into the fascist political party Kach. Yet unlike when far-right Israeli groups appeared in the early 1950s, this time they were not only the beneficiaries of a growing pipeline of American-Jewish financial support and political activism, but were also accompanied by the parallel rise of the parliamentary far right, with Begin's party—now, after a series of mergers, running as Likud—finally taking power in 1977, when the chapter concludes, benefitting from both the ongoing fallout from the 1973 Yom Kippur and the long-term crisis of Labor Zionist discrimination against Mizrahi Jews, driving that constituency into the arms of Likud.

Thematically, as noted above, this chapter looks at the cycle of victory and crisis that inspired a new, more religious Jewish far right in each country, and then almost immediately radicalized its representatives—a cycle that was, toward the end of the 1970s, heavily informed by the actions of Begin and his government. Thus, for example, was the capture of territory in the Six-Day War and the Israeli state's acquiescence to settlement-building followed by the 1973 Yom Kippur War and territorial compromises, largely through the 1978 Camp David Accords.

Equally, the late 1960s witnessed the birth of Jewish neoconservatism in the U.S., exemplified by the swing of *Commentary*, an influential magazine published by the mainstream American Jewish Committee, which had begun as a liberal outlet, and moved from radical socialism to the anti-communist hard right in the wake of the Six-Day War and America's growing quagmire in Vietnam.⁴ The Cold War further sharpened political divides and allegiances across the U.S. and the Middle East, and helped consolidate the emerging American-Israeli political alliance.

The victory and crisis cycle also played out through the oppositional politics of the new grassroots groups, largely provoked by the new Begin government's secularism and territorial compromises (problems these groups' members saw as inextricably linked), which challenged the earlier subsumption of far-right groups by the Israeli state—triggering a dialectical relationship of enmity and accommodation between the two sides. Thus, while Herut (and then Likud) represented the vanguard of oppositional Jewish far right movements that were now firmly ensconced in the Israeli political apparatus, organizations such as Gush Emunim and Kach agitated from outside state institutions, at the same time as seeking access to them.

Chapter four, “An Omen for the House of Israel,” continues the theme of crisis and accommodation in the period from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, while tracing the inroads that the burgeoning neoconservative movement was beginning to make into the transnational Jewish far right. In so doing, this chapter explores the ongoing, and growing, fusion of American and Israeli political styles and concerns, as well as how that fusion shifted in response to changing local and global politics. It also examines the impact that the acquisition of formal political

⁴ Benjamin Balint, *Running Commentary: The Contentious Magazine that Transformed the Jewish Left into the Neoconservative Right* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2010), x.

power in Israel had on the transnational Jewish far right—and how this, counterintuitively, would end up fueling much of the wider movement’s grievances and fears over territory.

This chapter is particularly concerned with Kach, which though enjoying only limited parliamentary success—winning a single seat in 1984, after multiple failed attempts—represented a further rise to power for the transnational Jewish far right. The chapter investigates Kahane’s evolving ideology, exploring how his racial and sexual politics developed into a potent strand of gendered racism that sought to recruit above all Mizrahi Jews, while informing a burgeoning mode of anti-miscegenation activism which continues to this day.

The chapter also examines the deepening sense of crisis among prominent Jewish far-right figures, particularly Kahane and the leaders of Gush Emunim, provoked by the loss of the Sinai settlements following the implementation of the Israel-Egypt peace agreement in 1982, while also surveying the internal debates within Israeli Jewish far-right circles caused by the twin impacts of Kahane’s election to the Knesset and the arrest of the Jewish Underground within a four-month period in 1984, drawing on the settler newspaper *Nekuda* and Kach and Gush Emunim circulars and flyers. A further focus in this chapter, following on from chapter 3, is the role of what Lila Corwin Berman terms the “American Jewish philanthropic complex” in advancing far-right settlement causes, and the impact of Israel’s embrace of neoliberalism on the country’s far right.⁵

Finally, the chapter introduces Benjamin Netanyahu, the son of the early Revisionist stalwart Benzion Netanyahu, and considers him as an emblem of the transnational Jewish far right shifting into a new phase—one characterized less by the fascist aesthetics of Kach and

⁵ Lila Corwin Berman, *The American Jewish Philanthropic Complex: The History of a Multibillion-Dollar Institution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).

more by the relatively more sober business of maintaining racial and religious domination through political procedure. Netanyahu's rise to stardom in the U.S. at the Israeli embassy and then the United Nations coincided with the emergence of the American New Right and the consolidation of the neoliberal and neoconservative movements, which created the ideal conditions for Netanyahu to make his name as an ostensible expert on terrorism and someone who instinctively understood the shared geopolitical priorities of Israel and the U.S. His high-profile roles enabled Netanyahu to present himself as a leader in waiting, who—like Kahane, although with a completely different approach and pathway—combined American and Israeli political styles and methods to form a hybrid approach that would eventually bring him parliamentary power.

The final chapter, “The Instruments of Havoc,” looks at the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, examining how the previous decades of political, financial, and institutional growth collided with the greatest threat to the transnational Jewish far right's vision yet—the Oslo Accords—and provoked the movement's most extreme violence so far. The chapter focuses on how the Jewish far right related to and reacted to this violence, internally and externally, and looks at the ever-greater harmonization of the Israeli and American wings of the movement. In this vein, this chapter considers how the changing geopolitical realities that accompanied the end of the Cold War helped deliver the transnational movement into its latest, most effective iteration yet—one that enjoyed political power in Israel and increasing influence in the United States, despite the acute and persistent violence of its “foot soldiers.”

The chapter begins with Kach's banning from electoral politics and ending with Netanyahu's election as Israeli prime minister. The period from 1988 to 1994 was a turbulent one

for Kach, with the ban being followed, two years later, by Kahane's assassination in New York, prompting a splintering of the movement. It did not lose its potential to sow destruction, however: one of its acolytes, Baruch Goldstein, massacring twenty-nine Palestinians in a Hebron mosque in 1994; as a result, the group was outlawed as a terrorist organization in Israel and added to the U.S. State Department Foreign Terrorist Organization list, precipitating Kach's decline as an organized movement.

Central to this chapter is another cycle of crisis and victory for the Jewish far right, beginning with the mid-1990s Oslo Accords, which drove both Goldstein's actions and led to the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish extremist, Yigal Amir, in 1995. This, in turn, led to the first election of Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister in 1996 and the ushering in of an era that sealed the preeminence of right-wing politics in Israel-Palestine, with which this chapter concludes. As the figurehead of this new era, both domestically and in the U.S., Netanyahu embodied the institutional and ideological heritage of the pre-World War II Jewish far right—secular-minded, territorially-maximalist and ethnically-exclusionist—and its present, wherein the increasingly messianic and radical ambitions of religious-Zionist settlers were advanced either through Netanyahu's direct intervention for pragmatic and populist reasons, or through their legitimization by association with Israel's new governing elite. At the same time, American-Jewish funding for far-right religious-Zionist settler projects, after growing for years, exploded thanks to the interventions of neoconservative American-Jewish institutions and individuals—whom Netanyahu resembled far more than the homegrown radicals whose ideology he was helping to mainstream. This fusion of American and Israeli far right political ideas and actors came amid the post-Cold War falling away of communism as the predominant

enemy in the U.S. (and by extension its allies), and the subsequent swiveling of the far right’s “clash of civilizations” narrative to Islam set the stage perfectly for Netanyahu. Here was an Israeli-born, American-educated, neoconservative ideologue, the symbol of a now-hybridized, transnational political culture maintained by a network of donors, strategists, thinkers, and activists that was gearing up to further consolidate its power in the twenty-first century. Small wonder, then, that Netanyahu—able to articulate the shared priorities of this global far-right movement in a language (and lingo) both of his transatlantic constituencies could understand—was dubbed, upon his 1996 electoral victory, Israel’s first “‘American’ Premier.”⁶

Conclusion

Beyond the academic queries I outlined at the start of this introduction, my work on this project has also been driven by more personal questions that have followed me over the years, stemming from my experiences both in Israel-Palestine and in the U.S. during the Trump era. This is a dissertation that spans multiple continents, eras, and histories, and so too do the roots of the impulses that have pushed me to undertake, and persevere with, this project. Even if these questions are not all directly referenced in this work, in the back of my mind as I have written have been probing, painful reflections on the endurance of hatred across time and space, and on how that persistence and the self-perpetuating loop it creates have brought my personal and professional life into a complicated, if productive, engagement. Over the nearly six years I have been working on this dissertation in some form, I have thought often, for example, of the resonances between my experience of leaving Israel-Palestine pursued by the memories of the

⁶ Serge Schemann, “The ‘American’ Premier,” *New York Times*, June 1, 1996.

“death to Arabs” chants I heard coming from far-right Israeli Jews there, and arriving in Charlottesville days before far-right white nationalists converged to chant “Jews will not replace us” on the University of Virginia campus. I have thought much, too, of the weekend in 2014 during which I attended a Nakba Day⁷ protest in the occupied West Bank, where Israeli forces shot three Palestinian teenagers with live ammunition, two of them fatally; and two days later attended a ceremony in Vienna to view the *Stolpersteine* that had been set into a Leopoldstadt sidewalk in memory of my ancestors who were murdered in the Holocaust—a ceremony at the end of which another attendee spontaneously cried out, “*Am Yisrael Chai!*” (“The people of Israel live”), a phrase commonly graffitied throughout Israel-Palestine, particularly in right-wing strongholds. Ever-present, too, has been the constant background noise of intensifying far-right antisemitism—noise which at times has risen to such a level as to make me question whether it was really the *Jewish* far right I needed to be focusing on, as I did in the wake of the Pittsburgh synagogue massacre in October 2018. In these moments, however, I have clung to the belief that the importance of understanding the Jewish far right and the devastating impacts of its thought and action, as well as the succor it has often given to its Christian counterparts, is not diminished by the emergence—or rather reemergence—of parallel hatreds.

Much of this is to say that this project is not immune from the conditions in which it was created, nor was it ever my intention that it would be so. My primary aim and motivation in writing this dissertation—to tell the story of the transnational Jewish far right—stem both from the recognition that there is a considerable gap in the literature on this topic, and the belief that this lack has real-world implications in the face of a growing global far right—one in which,

⁷ “Nakba”—meaning “catastrophe”—is the term given by Palestinians for the 1947-1949 expulsion and flight of over 750,000 Palestinians before, during, and immediately after Israel’s establishment.

improbable as it might have seemed twenty years ago, the transnational Jewish far right shows few qualms about aligning with white supremacists around the world. This dissertation ends before the start of this new phase in the history of the transnational Jewish far right, but my hope is that the ideological lineages and organizational alliances it interrogates will help shed some light on how, and why, these present-day dynamics came to be.

A final word on what does, and does not, feature in this dissertation. The Nakba and the occupation are inarguably the twin poles around which the history of Israel-Palestine converges and from which it has been driven forward—a fact borne out by the substantial, if unevenly distributed, literature on both. Both are ongoing processes whose various destructions, erasures, and other oppressions cast a shadow over the majority of the period under examination in this project. Yet although they are frequently mentioned in the following chapters, both by name and in reference to the processes they embody, they do not form the bedrock on which this dissertation sits, either analytically or narratively. The reason for this is straightforward: neither the Nakba nor the occupation are endeavors of the Jewish far right.

There is a natural tension here, because it is true that the far right has played a significant role in articulating a particular strand of Israel's ideological basis for advancing the settlement project and holding onto the occupied territories; and at the grassroots and government levels it has done much to accelerate the extant project of deepening and further entrenching the occupation. It is also true that the far right has contributed significantly to stamping out political discussion of the Nakba, while framing any efforts at historical redress—for example, advocating for the Palestinian right of return—as evidence of, at best, moral turpitude, and, at worst, sympathy for terrorism. Nonetheless, the occupation and even more so the Nakba are subject to

broad consensus, certainly across the Israeli-Jewish political spectrum, and also across much of the mainstream American-Jewish establishment. The old Zionist adage of “maximum land, minimum Arabs” is by no means an exclusively far-right slogan, even if the far right has traditionally taken a more expansive view of what “maximum land” means. Indeed, what the Nakba and the occupation show us is the degree of ideological overlap between the transnational Jewish far right and its putatively more mainstream peers—which is, ultimately, a key part of what this dissertation aims to reveal. Where the Jewish far right has set itself apart is in its aesthetics, the nature of its motivations, its fears and fantasies, its rhetoric and modes of politics—all things that make it worthy of its own investigation. But my goal in separating out the far right is not to hold it chiefly responsible for all Israel-Palestine’s ills, nor to exonerate the rest of an Israeli political spectrum that has, for the most part, contributed knowingly and abundantly to upholding the racial, religious, and military domination that has persisted in the country for three-quarters of a century. Rather, I hope I have shown just how integrated the far right has historically been in Israeli society and politics; why it has been able to make such inroads into the American-Jewish institutional mainstream; and how both of those things have worked together to create a transnational community that, over the course of the twentieth century, swung from punching above its weight to occupying the driver’s seat in both Israeli and American-Jewish communal politics.

Chapter 1: A Determined End

On May 10, 1933, the leadership of the U.S. branch of Betar, the far-right Zionist youth movement founded in Latvia the previous decade, wrote to chapter heads regarding an immediate change in uniform. The movement's official outfit of brown shirts and black ties had been "officially abandoned," the circular said, with the new uniform—consisting of dark blue shirts and pale blue ties—to be adopted straightaway. The old uniform was, from that moment on, "strictly forbidden."⁸

The letter, written by acting *netsiv* (commissioner) of Brith Trumpeldor of America (hereafter: Betar USA) David Mogilensky, does not explain the decision to ban the traditional uniform. But it is safe to assume that the optics of a Jewish youth group appearing in the same colors as Nazi paramilitaries during a time of proliferating antisemitism in Europe at least partly informed the move. The directive came amid the steady passage of anti-Jewish laws in Germany and the accumulation of violent acts of censorship and anti-intellectualism: just days before Mogilensky's letter went out, brown-shirted Nazi stormtroopers and German students had raided and burned the books of Berlin's Institute of Sexology, run by the German physician Magnus Hirschfeld—who was both gay and Jewish. And on the evening of May 10, the day Mogilensky wrote the letter, German students—many dressed in brown shirts—took to a Berlin square to set

⁸ David Mogilensky, Letter to Betar chapter leaders, May 10, 1933, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Betar collection, Bet 16 - 2/5.

fire to thousands of “un-German” books, many written by Jews, in a ceremony attended by tens of thousands. Joseph Goebbels addressed the crowd later that night; during his speech, the Nazi Party’s chief propagandist hailed the end of the “age of extreme Jewish intellectualism.”⁹

This was not the first, nor the last, instance of the interwar Zionist far right—loosely assembled under the mantle of Revisionist Zionism, which was founded and led by the Odessa-born intellectual Vladimir Jabotinsky—finding itself in an awkward juxtaposition to fascist, and often antisemitic, European political movements. Since Jabotinsky institutionalized the Revisionist movement in 1925, rebelling against what he saw as the misplaced priorities and near-inertia of the mainstream Zionists, its adherents—particularly those of its militaristic youth wing, Betar—had embraced a martial aesthetic, a monistic devotion to the primacy of the state, and a belief in the redemptive power of violence.¹⁰ Formally, these characteristics mimicked those of other European far-right nationalist groups that mushroomed following World War I, and in whose midst Betar developed, having formed in 1923 and remaining highly active in Poland in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Yet the content of the Revisionist ideology was heavily informed by Jewish history, drawing on the exploits of biblical warrior heroes in order to propose the creation of a “new” Jew—strong, independent, highly-trained, sovereign, and the antithesis of the “exilic” Jew. In the 1932 “Song of Betar,” for example, Jabotinsky name-checked Masada and King David while calling for a “glorious, beneficent and cruel” race to rise from “the pit of

⁹ Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2005), 36.

¹⁰ At the heart of Jabotinsky’s—and the Revisionists’—grievance with the mainstream or “General” Zionists (led by Chaim Weizmann) was their prioritizing of settlement as the primary means of achieving a Jewish state. The Revisionists, by contrast, believed that only a political solution—in this context, the declaration of a state on both sides of the River Jordan—would bring about a defensible Jewish state. In this, the Revisionists understood themselves as the true inheritors of Zionist founding father Theodor Herzl’s vision.

decay and dust” and “die or conquer the hill.”¹¹ So how did a movement that emphasized Jewish survival and pride—as well as specificity and chosenness—come to resemble, at various junctures in the first half of the twentieth century, political groups that sought the exclusion, oppression, or even destruction of the Jewish minorities in their countries? How did a far-right movement emerging from a non-dominant group attempt to align itself with the hegemonic culture that surrounded it? What processes were set in motion by the development of a far-right mode of Zionism, at a time when the wider Zionist movement was dominated by socialist, or at the very least liberal, groups? And what happened, as with the 1929 founding of Betar’s American branch, when that movement spread outside its European context?

‘Neither normal nor healthy’

The answers to many of these questions could be seen at work in the events that transpired in Palestine in the summer of 1929, and in their immediate aftermath—events in which the Jewish far right had a significant hand, and which played a major role in internationalizing the movement while creating a landmark moment in Zionist national memory. To this day, the interethnic violence that unfolded in Palestine that year is proffered by Jewish far-right actors as evidence not only of the righteousness of Jewish settlement—and violence—in the occupied West Bank, but also of the idea that the conflict in Israel-Palestine is at its heart about antisemitism, rather than about sovereignty, national rights, and liberation.

Understanding the roots and context of that violence, however, necessitates a survey of the early ideology of the Jewish far right—its ideas about land, borders, race, gender and

¹¹ Vladimir Jabotinsky, “Song of Betar,” reprinted in *This is Betar* (New York, NY: Brith Trumpeldor of America, 1949), 22.

sexuality, nationhood, and political economies—as well of the points at which this ideology overlapped with that of mainstream Zionism. An early manual for the movement, Jabotinsky’s “Principles of Betar,” which was penned in 1929 and reemerged in 1934 as “The Ideology of Betar,” sets out much of this credo, outlining the Revisionist leader’s vision for a Jewish nation and state. Although the text was intended as a manifesto for the far-right Zionist youth movement, Betar’s position at the time as the ideological and activist vanguard of the wider movement means that the booklet offers not only a general window onto where Jewish far-right thought was positioned during the period in which this dissertation begins, but also highlights some of its ideological overlaps with its far-right peers—whether around the supremacy of the state, the antipathy toward class struggle, the valorization of youth and violence, or the cult of the all-powerful leader. And although not explicitly referred to as such, Jabotinsky’s writing here conjures up well the contours of the “new Jew” (see below), with its emphasis on discipline, strength, militarism, state-building, and the ability to remake one’s own destiny—all masculinist traits associated with the “negation of the exile.”¹²

At the heart of Jabotinsky’s Betarian vision was a Jewish nation that subscribed to a monist doctrine under which the individual became subordinated to the collective and, above all, the state. In a passage that most closely resembles the fascist doctrines that were gaining ground in Europe at the time, Jabotinsky stressed that as well as being a revolutionary political program, this monism was also intended to “cure the Jewish spirit” of its diasporic character and

¹² Raz-Krakotzkin, “Zionist Return to the West,” 167. Raz-Krakotzkin notes the Eurocentrism of the Zionist dream of assimilatory sovereignty: the “negation of the exile,” he writes, “can be interpreted as the negation of all that was ‘Oriental’ in the Jews.” *Ibid.*, 167.

heritage.¹³ Betar's mission, as with that of Revisionist Zionism as a whole, was thus to form a Jewish state as part of a grand project to "create a 'normal,' healthy citizen for the Jewish nation", as Jews in the diaspora, Jabotinsky wrote, were "neither normal nor healthy."¹⁴ As the example which all Jewish youth were expected to follow, Betar represented "a generation that dedicates its life to the sole ideal of a Jewish State, without recognizing any other ideals"; with that foundation came the mission "to make Palestine the leading state of the civilized world, a country the customs and laws of which are to be followed by the whole universe."¹⁵ Jabotinsky also commented on the need for total uniformity, discipline, and subservience to a single leader, proposing that "[i]t is the highest achievement of a mass of free men ... to act in unison, with the absolute precision of a machine." That same mass, Jabotinsky continued, was to demonstrate discipline by "subordinat[ing] ... to one leader ... [who] is but the executor of *your* own will."¹⁶ Within such a construct, the class struggle pursued by Betar's socialist rivals was a direct threat to "the colonizing stage" in which the Jewish nation found itself, where "the state urgently needs *every one* of its pioneers." Equally, the colonizing imperative meant that only "[o]ne hundred percent Jewish Labor in all Jewish enterprises" was acceptable, and that there must be zero

¹³ Eran Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right: Revisionist Zionism and its Ideological Legacy* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 33.

¹⁴ Vladimir Jabotinsky, "The Ideology of Betar: Principles of Betar," republished as "This is Betar" (New York, NY: Brith Trumpeldor of America, 1949), 10; see also: Jabotinsky, "Ra'ayon Betar—The Ideology of Betar" (1929), accessed February 1, 2022, <http://www.saveisrael.com/jabo/jaboraayon.htm>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

tolerance for “the two national crimes—strikes and lockouts.”¹⁷ All of these principles were, Jabotinsky concluded, intended to form the basis for “a pure Betarian social theory” in the “future Jewish state.”¹⁸

Playing it straight

Jabotinsky devoted a small section of his manual to discussing, as he termed it, “the girl in Betar.” Noting at the outset that “[w]oman is a born organizer,” while “[t]he man was ‘the conqueror’”—a nod to the complementarity that is typical of nationalist movements—he praised women’s tendency to “orderliness” and “quiet systematization,” while warning about “the type of empty headed, flapperish girl.”¹⁹ And these “natural inclination[s]” served a purpose in the upbuilding of the Jewish nation: for “[a]n important branch of colonization,” Jabotinsky declared, “is house-management.”²⁰ This was a common view among those spearheading (or attempting to spearhead) colonial enterprises, and Jabotinsky’s invocation of such stereotypes

¹⁷ Ibid., 14-15. The existential, internecine war on class struggle was a consistent theme across Betar’s publishings as it set out its ideological stall during its early years: a 1928 handbook published in Poland by local leader Reuven Feldschuh, for example, centered the Jewish left as Betar’s main nemesis, even as it was laconic on how Jewish-Arab confrontation in Palestine would look. This emphasis became even more pronounced with the growth of Labor Zionism in Palestine; in the second quarter of 1929—just before violence broke out there between Jews and Arabs—Jabotinsky responded to Revisionism’s relative lack of inroads by “envisioning a war against the Jewish Left as a key feature of his movement.” And in the wake of 1929’s ructions, the two enemies merged in the Revisionist worldview: Betar journals published in Europe in the 1930s “linked the ‘Arab threat’ with the Jewish Left and urged members to prepare for a ruthless, imminent, and inevitable war against both opponents.” Daniel Heller, *Jabotinsky’s Children: Polish Jews and the Rise of Right-Wing Zionism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017) 102.

¹⁸ Vladimir Jabotinsky, “Ra’ayon Betar: Yesudot Hashkafat Haolam HaBetarit” (1934), 30, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 14.

¹⁹ Vladimir Jabotinsky, “The Ideology of Betar,” 1929, republished as “This is Betar” (New York, NY: Brith Trumpeldor of America 1958), 8-9, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16-9/7. Not all reprintings of the text contain the section on women; this edition does.

²⁰ Ibid.

around gender points us to the broader ideas that Jewish nationalists—on the far right and in the mainstream alike—drew from their contemporary environment.²¹ Indeed, much of early Zionist thought was deeply rooted in social processes of the time surrounding gender—masculinity above all—and sexuality, which in turn significantly informed Jewish nationalists’ self-identity and ideas on national and territorial integrity, including statehood and colonization. These wider social concepts around ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, and their intersection in hegemonic attitudes toward Jews, were deeply internalized by early Zionists—to the extent that examining them illuminates much of the connective tissue between mainstream and far-right Jewish nationalism, while showing the roots of many of the Jewish far right’s fears and fantasies that continue to mobilize the movement to this day.

Just as Zionism emerged in Europe in the wake of a process, spanning the nineteenth century, of rationalizing and disciplining sexuality and tying it to ideas regarding citizenship and national belonging (and the consequent “invention,” per Daniel Boyarin, of heterosexuality), so too did Revisionist Zionism appear as other interwar far-right and fascist movements across the continent were taking the genus of those ideas regarding “normative” gender roles and presentations, and crafting them into the bedrock of their ultranationalist ideologies.²² Jews were, of course, implicated in both these processes: as George Mosse has noted, racial othering took on

²¹ See, for example, Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics (Updated Edition)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, “Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in Twentieth-Century Colonial Cultures,” *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, edited by Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 344-373.

²² See: Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

“medicalized” dynamics in the 1800s as the “other” became caught up in “normative society’s preoccupation with visible symbols of health and sickness”; by the end of the century, this trend manifested as a scientific paralleling of Jews and gay men, with both portrayed as feminized by way of their supposed nervous disposition, weak physicality, and “tendency to hysteria.”²³ (Note, too, Jabotinsky’s comments on the Jewish diaspora in this regard, cited above.) Rather than rejecting these antisemitic stereotypes, early Zionist thinkers adopted them as the basis of the diasporic template they saw it as their mission to disinherit, irrespective of their personal politics or the stream of Zionism with which they identified. Indeed, referring to what he calls “the invention of the Jewish man,” Boyarin describes how modern Jewish masculinity was constructed in accordance with, rather than in opposition to, the hegemonic stereotype: for leading Jewish intellectuals such as Theodor Herzl and Sigmund Freud, assimilation represented “a sexual and gendered enterprise, an overcoming of the political and cultural characteristics that marked Jewish men as a ‘third sex,’ as queer in their world.”²⁴ This desired revolution for the Jewish man was not in keeping with Herzl and other early Zionist leaders’ vision for Jewish women: when the role of women was considered at all, it was proposed that they should, at best, contribute to the Zionist project in a limited capacity while focusing on supporting men in this endeavor; or, at worst, limit themselves to home-making and child rearing and little more. (More aggressive sexism was afoot, too: Berthold Feiwel, a leading Zionist thinker, argued that the modern Jewish woman had “degenerat[ed]” into “a bad despotic housewife.”)²⁵

²³ George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (New York, NY: Howard Fertig Inc., 1999), 64-5.

²⁴ Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, 222.

²⁵ Lynne M. Swarts, *Gender, Orientalism, and the Jewish Nation: Women in the Work of Ephraim Moses Lilien at the German Fin de Siècle* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 91-92.

This assimilated, rehabilitated “new Jew” was frequently imagined as a so-called “Muscle Jew” who embodied physical strength and independence, and who faced the (sovereign) future rather than the (exilic) past.²⁶ In this are the seeds of what would become the ideal of the “sabrah”—the native-born Israeli who was confident, physically powerful (and virile, symbolized by his success at plowing the supposedly “virgin” land of Palestine), and equally adept at wielding tools of nation-building and war.²⁷ Yet this iconography, and those who aspired to it, represented a form of self-erasure—as Paul Breines has argued, Muscle Jews “internalized unquestioningly the physical and psychological ideals of their respective dominating cultures . . . forget[ting] that . . . those ideals are predicated on a series of exclusions and erasures—of effeminate men, pacifism, Arabs, gentleness, women, homosexuals, and far from least, Jews.”²⁸

The project of political Zionism, then, and its attendant imperative of “liquidating the exile,” as per Jabotinsky and others, represented the parallel project of assimilation—and the

²⁶ See, for example, Ephraim Moses Lilien’s “Väter und Söhne” (“Father and Son”), (1912), one of many art nouveau paintings by the so-called “first Zionist artist” which sought to capture the essence of political Zionism. In the picture are two lines of Jews: one, on the left, stretches away from the horizon and toward the viewer; another, on the right, moves toward it. The line on the left is made up of men, women, and children in a variety of traditional and religious outfits, and a man at the front is clutching a Torah; their faces turned to the observer, they appear uncertain, even downtrodden. Next to them, the figure of Death looks on from on horseback. The right-hand line, meanwhile, consists solely of men dressed in identical modern clothing. Mostly turned away from the observer, their backs appear broad and straight, and most of them are turning to look at the other line of Jews. One bears more than a passing resemblance to Herzl. Lilien also sought to portray the “new Jewish women,” who usually appeared nude, and often surrounded by scenery suggesting “renewal” and “regeneration.” Swartz, *Gender, Orientalism*, 84.

²⁷ See, for example, Nurith Gertz, “‘I Am Other’: The Holocaust Survivor’s Point of View in Yehudit Hendel’s Short Story ‘They Are Others,’” in *Divergent Jewish Cultures: Israel and America*, eds. Deborah Dash Moore and Ilan S. Troen (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 217-37; Ella Shohat, “Territories of the National Imagination: Intifada Observed,” in *On the Arab-Jew, Palestine, and Other Displacements* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2017); Yaron Shemer, *Identity, Place, and Subversion in Contemporary Mizrahi Cinema in Israel* (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan University Press, 2013). Shohat and Shemer have both explored how the ideal type of the *sabrah* is limited to Ashkenazi (European) Jews, thus inevitably placing Mizrahim in the category of the feminine. See below for further discussion of gendered racialization in pre-state Palestine.

²⁸ Paul Breines, *Tough Jews: Political Fantasies and the Moral Dilemma of American Jewry* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1990), 167.



Fig. 1.1: Ephraim Moses Lilien, “Väter und Söhne” (“Father and Son”), 1912, public domain.

disciplinary gendering that came with it—writ large. As Boyarin explains, given that this framework was constructed in parallel with that of the nation-state, the “politically disempowered”—and thus feminized/queer—status of Jews in diaspora meant that the appearance of political Zionism was a natural response to the invention of heterosexuality.²⁹ Diaspora, he writes, “is essentially queer, and an end to Diaspora would be the equivalent of becoming straight.”³⁰ And, as Jabotinsky’s comments on the role of women made clear, the proposed mechanisms of this assimilation extended beyond the mimicry of the nation-state: in keeping with the operating logic of Western European nation-states, such assimilation rested not only on sovereignty but also on colonialism. “Herzlian Zionism,” Boyarin writes, “imagined itself as colonialism because such a representation was pivotal to the entire project of becoming ‘white men.’” Such pretensions, then, were a form of “colonialist drag,” in which “Jewish ‘women’ dressed up like ‘men.’”³¹

This logic of intertwined masculinity, compulsory heterosexuality, assimilation into Europeanness, and nationalism was vehemently expressed within the Yishuv in Palestine during the period with which this dissertation opens.³² (It made its impact on American-Jewish men in

²⁹ Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, 229.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 231.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 309. Jabotinsky, who was far from alone among his Zionist contemporaries—across the political spectrum—in understanding the settlement of Palestine as a colonial project, professed his admiration for “American frontier narratives” and the path of settlers to the American West; he also looked to the “pioneering spirit” of the Boers in South Africa. Kaplan, *Jewish Radical Right*, 116-7.

³² The Yishuv—“settlement”—refers to the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine, whose institutions were dominated by the Labor Zionist movement—the putatively more socialist branch of the Zionist movement, which produced Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, and which—building on its institutional experience and foundations—effectively monopolized the Israeli government during the country’s first three decades.

the first third of the twentieth century, too, although they sought to tread a fine line between assimilating into local—in this case Protestant—ideals about masculinity without succumbing to “aggression” and “domination”; they focused, instead, on the superficially more benign, although also colonialist, ideals of working the land and “heading out West.”³³ Same-sex relationships between men were considered a betrayal of Zionism and a consequence both of living among Arabs and of a lingering “exilic” mindset (and a nod, once more, to the idea of “compulsory heterosexuality.”)³⁴ Equally, the Zionist far right and mainstream alike strongly opposed intraethnic relationships, and took particular exception to liaisons between Jewish women and Arab men: members of the Zionist paramilitary group the Haganah (which became part of the Israeli army after Israel’s establishment) “considered themselves duty bound to fight the phenomenon [of miscegenation]”; Yehoshua Yevin, a maximalist Revisionist, journalist, and one of the founders of the far-right group Brit HaBirionim (discussed below), believed that Yishuv authorities were not sufficiently “defend[ing] the honor of Jewish women”; and one Tel Aviv police officer, striking a refrain that would become a popular rallying cry in later decades, accused Ashkenazi Jewish women of engaging in sex work with Arab men.³⁵ But even as the far right clamored more loudly about miscegenation, it was actually the Labor Zionists who, with their control of the Yishuv’s institutions, took the most concerted action against intraethnic

³³ Sarah Imhoff, *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 2, 15, 19.

³⁴ Ofri Ilany, “An Oriental Vice: Representations of Sodomy in Early Zionist Discourse,” in *National Politics and Sexuality in Transregional Perspective: The Homophobic Argument*, eds. Achim Rohde, Christina von Braun, Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (London, UK: Routledge, 2017), 107, 109, 111-2.

³⁵ Hillel Cohen, *Year Zero of the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1929* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2015), 208-9.

relationships.³⁶ This contrast played out against a seeming point of contradiction between Labor and Revisionist Zionists over gender and, specifically, the discrete (or not) roles of men and women in the nationalist project: for the socialists, equality between the sexes was a “staple of Zionist ideology,” while their far-right opponents sought a gendered demarcation between the public and private spheres, pursuing what they saw as a “natural” order in which men went out to work, fight, and do politics, while women looked after the domestic realm and the health of their family (and, consequently, the health of the nation).³⁷ Yevin, for his part, lamented women’s growing role outside the home in the modern era.³⁸ Yet despite the Labor Zionists’ ostensible appeal for women’s equality and advancement, women in the Yishuv’s pioneer movement were largely excluded from positions of power—and, more often than not, found themselves confined to exactly the same spaces the Revisionists sought to keep them in: the home, and especially the kitchen.³⁹ This reality, combined with the vigorous policing of sexual boundaries and the rhetorical appeals to egalitarianism, paints a rather more complex portrait of the relative stance of the Labor and Revisionist Zionists vis-à-vis gender: the Zionist far right may have been more explicitly anti-feminist, but its socialist counterparts—who held the balance of power in Palestine—did little to effect, rather than simply articulate, a sociopolitical model in which women were placed on equal footing with men.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Kaplan, *Jewish Radical Right*, 129.

³⁸ Ibid., 127-8.

³⁹ Ibid.; Lesley Hazleton, *Israeli Women: The Reality Behind the Myths* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1977), 17-9.

Such was the ideology of the Jewish far right when a burst of interethnic violence sprayed across Palestine in 1929. The chauvinism, maximalism, militaristic posturing, and pursuit of ethnic exclusionism would all converge on the remnants of a site of millennial religious devotion in Jerusalem—and would spur, in the wake of the violence that followed, a new frontier for far-right Zionism.

Going global: From the Western Wall to the ‘Fifth Avenue Ghetto’

Violence rarely emerges in a vacuum, and so it was with the events in Palestine in the summer of 1929, when a procession in Jerusalem, organized by the far-right, set off a chain of events that ended with hundreds of people killed. The British Mandate authorities’ divide and conquer policies—of a piece with those in their colonial possessions elsewhere—served to stoked Jewish-Arab division on the one hand, even while seemingly trying to tamp it down on the other, and their inconsistent—and frequently brutal—administration of the two populations exacerbated brewing resentments in the country. Jewish immigration to Palestine, and subsequent land accumulation, clashed with a growing sense of Arab national identity throughout the region, and in this tinderbox atmosphere, the slightest provocation was all but guaranteed to cause a conflagration. Jerusalem, with its added religious significance, was particularly liable to spark conflict—and long-simmering tensions were building over Zionist efforts to change the status quo at the Western Wall in the Old City, which included barring Jews from bringing seats and other “structures” to the site. For Revisionists, the Western Wall was a prominent symbol of the limits of General Zionism, and it was frequently invoked in the movement’s insistence on the need for the use of force in Palestine. In a self-fulfilling prophecy, this dynamic escalated

tensions at the site, which then heightened the far right's understanding of it as a focal point of their political and territorial campaign. This process could clearly be seen at work in a dispute between Jews and Arabs following a Yom Kippur service at the Wall in 1928, when Jewish worshipers brought seats and a partition to separate men and women, which caused a physical confrontation at the site. The incident energized maximalist Revisionist leaders in Palestine and Eastern Europe, such as Uri Zvi Greenberg, who would later become a decorated poet; Yevin; and Abba Ahimeir, a journalist and then-author of a column entitled "From the Notebook of a Fascist" in the Jabotinsky-edited Revisionist daily *Doar HaYom* ("Daily Mail") who dismissed Jewish plans to purchase the site—believing such plans to reflect a "Diasporic method"—and insisted on acquiring the Western Wall by political and military means.⁴⁰

Ahimeir went on to play a central role in the August 15, 1929, march to the Western Wall that prefaced the riots: a Betar faction aligned with his militant ideology organized the protest. The procession was ostensibly staged to mark Tisha B'Av, a day of mourning on which Jews remember the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. But the march was an overtly political one, with Betar protesters waving Zionist flags, singing "HaTikvah"—a Zionist hymn that would become the Israeli national anthem—and chanting, "The Wall is ours."⁴¹ A Muslim counterprotest was arranged at the Wall the following day; interpersonal violence between Jews and Arabs broke out shortly after; and by August 23, widespread intercommunal violence erupted, lasting a week. The most notorious incident in the rebellion, also known as the Buraq Uprising, was a massacre in Hebron that killed dozens of Jews and drove out the city's

⁴⁰ Cohen, *Year Zero*, 71.

⁴¹ Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh, *Palestine, Our Homeland (Biladuna Filastin) vol. 4* (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2018), 265. Cited in Cohen, *Year Zero*, 1.

Jewish community. But there were fatalities everywhere, and by the time the outburst ended, 133 Jews and at least 116 Arabs were dead, and hundreds more wounded.⁴²

Jabotinsky expressed regret that the main Betar leadership had not planned the demonstration, although others did not see the same degree of separation between Jabotinsky and the Western Wall protests: under his editorship, *Doar HaYom* frequently reported on tensions at the site, and following the August violence, Labor Zionist and Arab media accused Jabotinsky and his paper of “inciting young Jews to protest at the Western Wall.”⁴³ Regardless of his level of personal involvement in the build-up to the bloodshed, however, Jabotinsky was quick to capitalize on it—as was the wider Revisionist movement. The events sparked the formation of the Irgun Zvai Leumi (Irgun), the ultranationalist military wing of the Revisionist movement, many of whose members were drawn from Betar.⁴⁴ This development would have far-reaching consequences—not only “end[ing] Leftist organisations’ monopoly on the Jewish population’s

⁴² On 1929 and its various lineages, see, for example, Rana Barakat, “The Jerusalem Fella: Popular Politics in Mandate Palestine,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 46, no. 1 (Autumn 2016), 7-19; Philip Mattar, “The Role of the Mufti of Jerusalem in the Political Struggle over the Western Wall, 1928-29,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 19, no. 1 (January 1983), 104-118; Cohen, *Year Zero*; Naomi W. Cohen, *The Year After the Riots: American Responses to the Palestine Crisis of 1929-30* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1988). For contrasting frameworks for 1929 within the literature on the Jewish far right, see, for example, Heller, *Jabotinsky’s Children*, and Medoff, *Militant Zionism*. A handful of Jews returned to Hebron following the massacre; the first, Daniel Elkana, went back a year later “at the request of his Arab neighbours ... who had undertaken to guarantee his safety.” *Jewish Guardian*, August 15, 1930, 3. The National Archives (UK), folder CO 733/192/4.

⁴³ Peter Bergamin, *The Making of the Israeli Far-Right: Abba Ahimeir and Zionist Ideology* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 162; Colin Shindler, *The Rise of the Israeli Right: From Odessa to Hebron* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 89; Heller, *Jabotinsky’s Children*, 84.

⁴⁴ Arie Perliger and Leonard Weinberg, “Jewish Self-Defence and Terrorist Groups Prior to the Establishment of the State of Israel: Roots and Traditions,” in Leonard Weinberg and Ami Pedahzur, eds., *Religious Fundamentalism and Political Extremism* (London, UK: Frank Cass, 2004), 100. Menachem Begin, a Betar leader who would become head of the Irgun and later Prime Minister of Israel, wrote in his memoir that the Irgun was driven by “the soil of their country and the blood of their murdered people.” Menachem Begin, *The Revolt* (New York, NY: Dell Publishing, 1978), 42.

organised military activities,” which would later lead to fierce internecine conflict in pre-state Palestine, but also providing part of the thrust that would send the Jewish far right global.⁴⁵

Indeed, the bloodshed in summer 1929 was a local affair, but the fallout—not least Revisionist activists’ efforts to capitalize on it—spanned continents. In Palestine, the maximalist Revisionist leaders Ahimeir, Greenberg, and Yevin founded Brit HaBirionim, a small, anti-Arab and anti-socialist revolutionary group that staged sometimes-violent protests against the governing institutions of the British Mandate, as well as those of the Yishuv.⁴⁶ Drawing heavily on Italian Fascism, Brit HaBirionim, including its leaders, initially saw the Nazi Party as a national liberation movement that was forging the path to a “modern Germany”—Yevin wrote about “Hitler, the builder of the new, Great Germany,” even as he acknowledged the Nazi leader’s plans to destroy European Jewry—before changing its stance once Germany passed its anti-Jewish economic boycott.⁴⁷ Jabotinsky, meanwhile, aware of the recruitment opportunities presented by the unrest in Palestine, began urging his followers to capitalize on the conflict: in one letter, he reassured a fellow Revisionist that “[the riots] will be useful to us from a political point of view, so relax; but to the outside, we need to show shock.”⁴⁸ And his sights were set beyond Palestine: in an early example of his awareness of the importance of public relations, Jabotinsky launched an international media campaign in which he called for the Western Wall to become a Jewish-only prayer site and, hewing to one of his favored themes, for the establishment

⁴⁵ Perliger and Weinberg, “Jewish Self-Defence,” 100.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 100-1.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 101; Joseph Heller, *The Stern Gang: Ideology, Politics, and Terror, 1940-1949* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 1995), 20; Shindler, *Rise of the Israeli Right*, 106. Yevin believed, Heller writes, that Nazism’s true value was in its undermining of the “false Zionism” of Ahad Ha’am, the founder of cultural Zionism who articulated a vision for the Jewish state in opposition to that of Herzl. Heller, *Stern Gang*, 20.

⁴⁸ Heller, *Jabotinsky’s Children*, 83.

of a Jewish military in Palestine.⁴⁹ He was, in effect, issuing a call to arms to supporters overseas—and those supporters were listening.

'Fascism in Yiddish or Hebrew'

The sense of crisis sparked by the uprising in Palestine galvanized the as-yet inchoate American Revisionist movement. Far-right Zionism had so far struggled to gain the same level of traction in the U.S. that it had in Europe and Palestine, as evinced by the lackluster reception given to Jabotinsky during his first visit to the country in 1926. Partly, this was to do with the far more muted role Zionism played in American-Jewish life pre-World War II, which stifled its potential to develop a more militant stream. The mainstream American-Jewish press frequently expressed an innate suspicion of Jabotinsky's far-right politics mainstream American-Jewish press, while the ideological enmity between Revisionists and the Histadrut—the Jewish labor union in Palestine which was a powerful Labor Zionist institution—also had transnational implications, with the American Revisionists adopting their Palestinian counterparts' anti-Histadrut stance. This, as Rafael Medoff notes, disadvantaged a Revisionist movement that was seeking to recruit from an American-Jewish community with strong ties to labor unions.⁵⁰ Although 1929 did not fully unseat any of these trends, it did provide the impetus—and scope—for American Revisionists to begin a long decade of institutionalization, starting with the formalization that year of the U.S. branch of Betar. This institutional advance had much to do with Joseph Beder, a Russian-born prominent Revisionist activist who had moved to New York from Palestine in

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 20-1.

1927; after numerous attempts to strengthen ties between the Jewish far right in the U.S. and elsewhere, Beder finally found a conducive environment after returning from a trip back to Palestine in the fall of 1929, and the first New York chapter of Betar was up and running that December, with more following in short order.⁵¹

While some of the communal dynamics that had so far restricted Revisionism's growth in the U.S. remained—building an organization “on military lines” and being publicly associated with Revisionism were significant obstacles—there was, as documents from Betar USA's early years show, a novel sense of energy around the organization and its mission. As well as the local Betar chapters that were appearing, new Revisionist publications also sprang up in the early 1930s, and the country's first Revisionist conference was held in December 1930, drawing hundreds of participants from across the country and presided over by the Ukrainian-born Mordecai Danzis, who had spent years trying to help Jabotinsky establish an institutional Revisionist presence in the U.S.⁵² The first formal American Betar convention followed in 1932, with a flier advertising the event praising the lesson in “stern and necessary nationalism” that Betar was teaching American-Jewish youth, and stressing that “[O]nly our youth with its splendid enthusiasm ... with its fine devotion, can materialize our nation's hope.”⁵³ The founding of the New Zionist Organization in 1935 followed, after the Revisionists voted to split from the World Zionist Organization, and an American branch (the New Zionist Organization of America,

⁵¹ Brith Trumpeldor of America, “Three Years of Betar in America,” *Betar Monthly* 1, no. 12 (April 1932), 14; Yisrael Medad, “A Short Introduction to Betar North America 1927-1939,” *Betarim in North America Blog*, August 17, 2014, <http://betarimna.blogspot.com/2014/08/>.

⁵² Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 16; “Revisionists Eye Brandeis as Possible W.Z.O. President,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, December 30, 1930; “Mordecai Danzis, Yiddish Editor, Dead; Buried Near Jabotinsky,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, August 18, 1952.

⁵³ Brith Trumpeldor of America, “To the Jewish Youth of America,” May 1932, cited in Medad, “A Short Introduction to Betar.”

or NZOA) arrived shortly after; two years later, reflecting the growing stature of the American-Jewish far right, the presidency of the Revisionist movement officially transferred from London to the U.S.⁵⁴

Even with its renewed sense of purpose and growing membership, the Revisionist movement continued to lack the stature and resources of its mainstream counterparts. Yet these ongoing financial and organizational struggles did not prevent the Jewish far right's leaders from forcefully articulating their Jabotinsky-inspired vision for the American-Jewish community and its role surrounding the battle for a Jewish state. In the pages of their movement's new periodicals, American Revisionists accused mainstream Zionist leaders of sabotaging Herzl's vision, while demanding emigration to Palestine and insisting on the precarity of Jewish life in the diaspora—a diagnosis that inflamed their more mainstream ideological rivals, and which rang differently in the relative calm of the U.S. than it did in a soon-to-be Nazified Europe. David Mogilensky, the Betar leader who would later issue the memo about dropping the group's brown-shirted uniforms, argued in 1931 that Zionism was the solution to pogroms in Russia and anti-Jewish discrimination in the U.S. alike; yet he argued that philanthropy alone was not enough—young American Jews must, he wrote, emigrate to Palestine.⁵⁵ In a 1932 letter to Betar USA's members' magazine *Betar Monthly*, Jabotinsky warned against a "Fifth Avenue *ghetto*," decrying the "debasement influences of the squallor [sic] called *ghetto*"—which, in the context of

⁵⁴ *Zionews* 1 (October 1940), 1, NYPL archive, *Zionews* collection, *ZAN-*P562. Later, seeking ways to undermine the NZOA, Rabbi Irving Miller, chair of the American Jewish Congress executive and leading ZOA member, suggested suing the rival organization on the grounds that their name was "intended to defraud." Zionist Organization of American, "Meeting Minutes," November 16, 1942, Central Zionist Archive, F38/52.

⁵⁵ David Mogilensky, "Problems of the Jewish Youth in America: Zionism as the Only Solution," *Betar Monthly* 1, no. 8 (December 1931), 4-5, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Betar collection, Bet 16 - 8/13.

“Betari pride” about which Jabotinsky was writing, referred broadly to the Jewish diasporic condition. Joseph Beder, meanwhile, who was by now working out of the Revisionist headquarters in New York, called in 1933 for a new Hebrew culture rooted in a Zionism that would bring about “not only a change of address for a number of Jews, but a transformation from a slave (or servant) to a free, original Jewish group.”⁵⁶ And, at an event held that same year at New York’s Carnegie Hall in honor of Chaim Weizmann, the pro-British former head of the Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency for Palestine, Revisionists handed out fliers referring to him as the “Prophet of Surrender” and the “Emasculator of Herzlian Zionism.”⁵⁷

As Betar and the Revisionists’ activities ramped up, and as they organized more explicitly against their mainstream and left-wing rivals, so did they attract greater scrutiny and criticisms in return. The New York chapter of the Zionist Organization of America referred to the Revisionists as “Fascisti, Hitlerites, Blackshirts,” while Hayim Greenberg, a Labor Zionist stalwart, cited Revisionism’s combined “imperialism” and “hatred...[of] internationalism” in his assessment that it represented a fascist threat. The Revisionist movement, Greenberg argued, had built on its “hostility to Labor...[with] ideologies and political tendencies which had sprung from the soil of other nations”; its strident militarism, meanwhile, was undertaken with “a mixture of small-town

⁵⁶ Medad, “A Short Introduction to Betar”; Vladimir Jabotinsky, “A Message from Jabotinsky,” February 20, 1932, 1, published in *Betar Monthly* 1, no. 12 (April, 1932), Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 8/13; Joseph Beder, “Thoughts,” *The Revisionist* 2, July 1933, 5, NYPL archives, *ZAN*P580. Emphasis in the original.

⁵⁷ United Zionists-Revisionists of America, “Greetings to the Prophet of Surrender,” flier, June 28, 1933, YIVO Archive, I-414, Box 1, Folder 1. The Jewish Agency for Palestine—now the Jewish Agency for Israel—is a quasi-governmental organization that, at the time, was responsible for bringing Jewish immigrants to Palestine and assisting with land purchases.

faith in the magic potency of a military uniform, post-war madness, and adventurism.”⁵⁸ Hayyim Fineman, one of the founders of the American branch of the Labor-Zionist Poalei Zion (“Workers of Zion”), also likened Revisionism to fascism and urged American-Jewish youth to resist “the tendency toward Fascism now manifest among Jews.”⁵⁹ Stephen Wise, an eminent American rabbi, warned a New York synagogue congregation in 1935 that Revisionism was “Fascism in Yiddish or Hebrew” and, citing the movement’s militarism, called it “the most grievous and even tragic form of Jewish assimilation in so far as it...emulates the world civilization at its worst.”⁶⁰ (Jabotinsky, responding to Wise’s describing of Revisionism as “fascist,” argued that it was “not a term of derogation, but a name of a political belief of a power that is still friendly to the Jews.”)⁶¹ And the journalist Marie Syrkin, participating in a roundtable on Revisionism in the eminent American-Jewish magazine *Menorah Journal*, dismissed it as “the unimpressive Jewish variant on the fascist theme.”⁶² These charges of extremism and violence were rapidly accelerated by the 1933 murder of Haim Arlosoroff, a leader in the Socialist-Zionist movement in the Yishuv, as he strolled along the Tel Aviv beach one June evening. Although responsibility for his assassination has never been conclusively established,

⁵⁸ Zionist Organization of America, Minutes, 23 Mar. 1931, 1, 16-Gimel/7, Central Zionist Archives. Cited in Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 19. Hayyim Greenberg, “Revisionism,” in Greenberg and Joseph Sprinzak, *Revisionism and Mizrachi* (Milwaukee, 1934), 5-7, New York Public Library archives, Betar collection, *ZP-*PWC n. C. 63-68.

⁵⁹ “Fineman Calls for Fight on Fascism,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, December 2, 1934.

⁶⁰ “Wise Assails Revisionism in Rebuke to Jabotinsky,” *The American Jewish World*, March 15, 1935, 1, 4. The wire report on Wise’s speech claimed, somewhat breathlessly, that he had “administered a death blow to Revisionism in America.” *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶¹ “Wise Attacked in Chicago Talk by Jabotinsky,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, March 29, 1935. The following year, Italy and Germany entered into a formal alliance; in 1938, Italy passed the antisemitic racial laws, which also targeted its colonized subjects.

⁶² Marie Syrkin, “Labor Zionism Replies,” *Menorah Journal* 23 (April-June 1935), 66-79. Cited in Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 22.

there was initial widespread suspicion surrounding the Revisionists in Palestine, who had repeatedly attacked Arlosoroff in their own media outlets—not least over his efforts to negotiate with the new Nazi government in order to secure the passage of German Jews to Palestine. The month after the murder, British Mandate police arrested Ahimeir, along with over a dozen members of Betar, Brit HaBirionim, and the Revisionist Party; Ahimeir, along with two others, was charged with orchestrating the assassination, but was acquitted the following year. His co-defendants, although tried, were also eventually acquitted.⁶³ Yet the association with political violence, incitement, and far-right radicalism remained ever-present for the Revisionist movement’s opponents—both in Palestine and the U.S.

By the mid-1930s, then, the ideological enmity between the Zionist far right and the rest of the movement had been firmly established, and would rear its head in drastic—and deadly—ways in the decades to come. Yet geopolitical developments in the Middle East and Europe would, as the 1940s approached, temporarily overshadow that internal rivalry. Indeed, the accumulating terrors of the Nazi regime in Europe, and a series of perceived setbacks to the Zionist project in Palestine, provoked action and calls for escalation that, on both sides of the Atlantic, extended beyond the Jewish far right. Revisionist-led efforts to evacuate Jews from Europe by stepping up clandestine immigration to Palestine also won backing from Labor Zionists, who overcame their initial fears of British retaliation.⁶⁴ An Arab uprising in Palestine, which began in 1936, led mainstream Zionists to adopt the “offensive ethos” that recognized conflict in Palestine as all but inevitable—a stance that had previously mostly been the preserve

⁶³ Bergamin, *Making of the Israeli Far-Right*, 190-2.

⁶⁴ Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 34. This was known as the “*Aliyah Bet*” program. “*Bet*” is the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet; “*Aliyah Aleph*” (the first letter of the alphabet) was the term given to immigration permitted by the British Mandate authorities.

of the Revisionists. (This shift toward an offensive posture started, as the Israeli historian Anita Shapira has noted, with the 1929 violence in Palestine: those events all but buried the “defensive ethos,” which had sought to colonize Palestine without instigating violence conflict.)⁶⁵ The findings of the 1937 Peel Commission, the British government inquiry into the uprising which proposed partitioning Palestine, provoked fury among Revisionist and mainstream Zionist leaders alike: on the far right, Ahimeir and Menachem Begin—a young Betar leader, soon-to-be head of the Irgun, and future Israeli prime minister—organized protests in Palestine and Poland, respectively; elsewhere on the Zionist political spectrum, Stephen Wise deemed the plan “the gravest betrayal of a most sacred trust,” while Abba Hillel Silver, an emerging Zionist leader in the U.S.; Golda Myerson (later Meir) a Histadrut leader and future Israeli prime minister; and Louis Brandeis, the Supreme Court justice, also strongly rejected partition.⁶⁶ And the 1939 White Paper, a British policy document that dismissed the idea of partition but proposed strict limitations on Jewish immigration to Palestine and on Jewish land purchases, proved a “radicalising influence” for the Irgun and the rest of the Jewish far right, while raising the hackles of mainstream Zionist leaders in the US.⁶⁷

This widespread political turmoil—vastly exacerbated by the looming outbreak of World War II—drove the Jewish far right’s growing sense of urgency over the need to declare a state on both sides of the River Jordan, expand Jewish immigration into Palestine, and win support for

⁶⁵ Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 173, 358.

⁶⁶ Shindler, *Rise of the Israeli Right*, 142, 144, 164; Avi Shilon, *Menachem Begin: A Life*, trs. Danielle Zilberberg and Yoram Sharett (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 464, f/n 89; Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 31.

⁶⁷ Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 30-3, 37-8; Shindler, *Rise of the Israeli Right*, 170.

the idea of a Jewish army. These multiple crises, combined with the upbuilding of the Jewish far right that was already ongoing in the U.S., pushed the Revisionists' American arm into a new phase and helped establish movement-wide practices that accelerated the transnational character of the Jewish far right during the war. As chaos spread across Europe and the Middle East, the American-Jewish far right sought to capitalize on its own relative stability in order to assist the movement in its own way, by gathering resources, appealing to the conscience of the American public, and lobbying political leaders. And it was precisely in the pursuit of this shared project that a truly international movement was born—led, at the outset, by a group of men who traveled from Palestine to the U.S. to aid the cause, and who, in their own ways, represented the past, present, and future of the transnational Jewish far right.

Revising the Revisionists

In February 1938, delegates from around the world gathered in Paris for a Revisionist conference aimed at establishing guidelines for cooperation between the New Zionist Organization, Betar, and the Irgun. Out of the gathering came the decision to ramp up Revisionist Zionist campaigning in the U.S.—a project that took on additional urgency in the wake of the *Anschluss*, Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria, the following month, and *Kristallnacht* that November. Accordingly, a small group of prominent Revisionists—among them Yitzhak Ben-Ami and Haim Lubinski, both of the Irgun, and Col. John Henry Patterson, a Christian Zionist who had led a Jewish contingent in the British Army that Jabotinsky had campaigned for during World War I—arrived in the U.S. in early 1939, intent on launching a fundraising and public relations offensive. The need for such a campaign was further stressed to Jabotinsky by Ben Zion Netanyahu, a

young, Warsaw-born Revisionist activist who had moved to as a child Palestine with his family, and who, as a college student, joined the Revisionist movement, befriended Ahimeir, and became an ideological fellow-traveler of Brit HaBirionim.⁶⁸ Jabotinsky, impressed by Netanyahu, urged him to further the Revisionist cause in the U.S., and, in early 1940, the two men arrived in New York within a fortnight of each other. In an indicator of the sometimes-blurred ideological boundaries between the Zionist far right and mainstream, Netanyahu's residence in the U.S. was made possible by Emanuel Neumann, a "stalwart" Zionist Organization of America figure (and later its president) who acted as Netanyahu's guarantor as per U.S. immigration requirements, and who was—at least in private—"sympathetic" to the Revisionists.⁶⁹

By the time Jabotinsky and Netanyahu landed in New York, the first group of Revisionists who had arrived the previous year were ready to make their way back to Palestine and the U.K., having mostly failed to raise the sums of money they had anticipated for Irgun-facilitated efforts to smuggle Jews into Palestine. They had also, crucially, struggled to get their proposed public relations machine up and running. Yet where this group had failed, a second delegation of Irgun activists, who made staggered arrivals in New York in the first half of 1940, would succeed mightily. The leader of the group, Hillel Kook—who would go by Peter Bergson while in the U.S., resulting in the outfit's nickname of the Bergson Boys—came from an illustrious family. His uncle, Abraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, had been the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine from 1921 until his death in 1935, and was a foundational figure in religious Zionism—a political-religious ideology that blended nationalism with observant Judaism, and

⁶⁸ Anshel Pfeffer, *Bibi: The Turbulent Life and Times of Benjamin Netanyahu* (London, UK: C. Hurst & Co., 2018), 17, 21-3; Saidel, "Revisionist Zionism in America," 38-9.

⁶⁹ Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 47-8.

which would come to dominate the Jewish far right. Tzvi Yehuda Kook, his son and Hillel Kook's cousin, would go on to head the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva in Jerusalem, which had been founded by his father and which would become the brain factory for the Jewish far right in the 1970s and '80s. Joining Kook was Arie Ben-Eliezer, a former Betar member who had taken up arms during the 1929 and 1936 unrest in Palestine; Yitzhak Ben-Ami, returning after the failed first delegation; and Alexander Rafaeli, who had taken part in Palestine immigration operations from Europe. Shortly after, the group was bolstered by the arrivals of Eri Jabotinsky, Vladimir Jabotinsky's son, and Shmuel Merlin, another Betar graduate and a former high-ranking official in the worldwide Revisionist movement.⁷⁰

Although Kook's group were all Betar and Irgun veterans—that is, members of groups that prioritized the use of force as a primary means to a political end—their main designated battleground in the U.S. was that of public relations, including political lobbying (which Netanyahu would also prioritize as head of the NZOA). Indeed, as the Israeli historian Judith Tydor Baumel notes, the group understood the importance of public mood and propaganda, allowing them to make “an almost seamless transition from European-style diplomacy to American media manipulation.”⁷¹ While the uniqueness Baumel ascribes to the Irgun delegation's PR efforts and their impact may be overstated (although she argues that they were the first Jewish group in the country to try and influence policy through PR), they did, undoubtedly, contribute to a template of pugilistic propagandizing—frequently couched in rhetoric legible to the average American—that would become a calling card of the American-

⁷⁰ Baumel, *'Bergson Boys,'* 8-13; Medoff, *Militant Zionism,* 47-9.

⁷¹ Baumel, *'Bergson Boys,'* xix.

Jewish far right. As we shall see throughout this dissertation, the hectoring, often existential notes struck by Kook's group—whether in the form of paid advertisements in the mainstream press, open letters, press releases, or publicity stunts—would be repeated time and again by Jewish far-right actors in different periods and places, among them the most notorious adopter of the Irgun delegation's prioritization of PR: one Meir Kahane, whose father, Rabbi Charles Kahane, often took his young son to the group's subcommittee meetings.⁷²

With the Revisionists' high-profile Palestine contingent now established in New York, the Jewish far right in the country experienced another heightened wave of activity, including relaunched journals and a proliferation of Irgun delegation spin-offs—essentially front groups aimed at obfuscating the Bergson Boys' connection to the Revisionist movement, whose reputation as fascist-adjacent continued to precede it.⁷³ Perhaps the most notable of these new groups was American Friends for a Jewish Palestine (AFJP, founded in 1940; presenting itself as an independent body for American right-wing Zionists, the organization sought, among other things, to challenge the idea that campaigning for a Jewish state demonstrated disloyalty to the U.S.—at the time one of the biggest concerns of mainstream Zionists, who feared an antisemitic backlash over their activism.⁷⁴ The AFJP also worked, as did its establishment rivals, to universalize its message for the wider American audience—emphasizing its twin fights against fascism and communism, for example, and seeking alliances with explicitly Christian action groups.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, the institutional arm of the Revisionists—represented in the U.S. by the

⁷² *Ibid.*, 97.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 44, 50.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 50, 52.

NZOA—also set about expanding its political footprint. As did the Irgun delegation and its offshoots, the NZOA published an in-house bulletin, *Zionews*, which featured insider updates about the Revisionist movement alongside geopolitical analyses, and which served as a platform for broadsides against Revisionism’s enemies—from its Zionist rivals to the *New York Times*, which was castigated for apparent pro-Arab bias.⁷⁶

Betar USA, too, relaunched its own organ—*Hadar*, or “Glory,” named for one of the central principles of Betar outlined by Jabotinsky—in 1940. Like the other U.S. arms of the Revisionist movement, Betar USA had been bolstered in 1939 by a prestigious arrival to New York from Palestine: Aharon Propes, who as a teenage Zionist activist in Riga, Latvia, had organized the youth meeting in October 1923 with Jabotinsky which led to the founding of Betar. In the first issue of the revamped *Hadar*, Propes declared his aim to make Betar USA “the strongest chapter of the organization,” and the rest of the issue presented a similar communal statement of intent while reinscribing the core Betar—and Revisionist—values. The issue’s editorial, lauding Jewish immigration to Palestine, declared that “[w]eak, timid, cringing men and women from the ghettos [sic] of Europe arrive and raise their heads, square their shoulders, spit on their hands, and set to work”; and a contribution from Jabotinsky called Jewish youth “the piston rod” that would move people out of their “death-like equilibrium” in desiring a Jewish state.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ “[T]here is hardly a newspaper the world over which could equal the *New York Times*,” the comment in *Zionews* read, “...[except that] the *New York Times* was founded by a Jew, and is owned and controlled by Jews; to be exact, by assimilationist Jews.... There is no difference between red assimilationists in Russia, Jewish Lords in Britain [sic], Jewish assimilationists in pre-Hitler Germany and Jewish press lords in America.” “All the News That’s Fit to Print,” *Zionews*, May 19, 1941.

⁷⁷ Aharon Zwi Propes, “Brith Trumpeldor,” *Hadar* 3, no. 1 (February 1940), 2, 7, NYPL archives, *Hadar* collection, *PZX+.

Just as the American-Jewish far right seemed to be building up a fresh head of steam, however, the global Revisionist movement was dealt a devastating blow by the death of Jabotinsky in August 1940, while he was still in New York. Yet not all arms of the Jewish far right were equally affected. The loss sent shockwaves throughout Betar and the NZOA, both of which were firmly under Jabotinsky's leadership; the NZOA, in particular, was left "leaderless," with Netanyahu mostly working alone out of the organization's New York headquarters.⁷⁸ By contrast, the Irgun group was both bigger and better-financed, and could also claim Jabotinsky's son, Eri, as one of its own. Moreover, Kook's group had established a degree of autonomy from the Revisionist establishment, which rankled Jabotinsky (who was also frustrated that the AFJP was not campaigning for a Jewish army), but, in the wake of his passing, left them insulated from the sudden loss of leadership.⁷⁹ Netanyahu, perhaps sensing which way the wind was blowing, resigned from the NZOA shortly after Jabotinsky's death and joined the Irgun delegation executive, although he rejoined the NZOA after about six months, after the dust had settled.⁸⁰

Beyond the organizational disruption, the personal loss felt by the Revisionists was clear. A *Hadar* memorial issue, published early the following year, featured an array of reflections from Jabotinsky's bereft contemporaries which underlined both the borderline cult of personality surrounding the Revisionist leader and the transnational dimensions of the movement he led. Beinesh Epstein, a Lithuanian-born Revisionist activist and close friend of Jabotinsky, called him "the Jewish Eagle... [with a] lordly appearance," while Mordecai Katz, a Betar leader, mourned "my great teacher, the king of my dreams"; Mara Propes (Aharon Propes' wife), meanwhile,

⁷⁸ Pfeffer, *Bibi*, 32.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*; Baumel, 'Bergson Boys,' 62, 64.

⁸⁰ Baumel, 'Bergson Boys,' 68-9.

recalled Jabotinsky's "magic voice eternally penetrating into all the corners of your soul. And feeling the increasing wave of love, the readiness to follow the man wherever it may be, surrendering everything to him."⁸¹ And Z. H. Wachsman, who had been a leading Betar activist in Poland during the 1930s, memorialized Jabotinsky by reflecting on how his trips to the U.S. had greatly influenced the Revisionist movement in Europe: Jabotinsky had, Wachsman wrote, conceptualized the New Zionist Organization during one of his visits Stateside, "under the mighty influence of Americanism as he understood it," and, following Jabotinsky's return, "everything moved in an orbit of intensity, huge schemes and colossal work—the American Tempo."⁸²

The Jewish far right had, then, lost its founder and leader: a borderline cult-like figure who had imprinted on the movement its militarism, monism, and aggressive maximalist nationalism, and who had spotted its transnational potential early on, seeking to instrumentalize the diaspora in pursuit of a nation-state. In many ways, Jabotinsky's death in what he saw as "exile" symbolized the coming contradictions that the movement would have to resolve, between the imperative to "liquidate" the diaspora, and the need to maintain that diaspora in order to prop up the homeland. Amid the chaos of a global war and the fight for statehood, however, those tensions remained below the surface—and the transnational Jewish far right, now leaderless, had deepening internal divisions to contend with.

⁸¹ Beinesh Epstein, "The Lonely Eagle," *Hadar* 4, nos. 1-3 (February-March-April 1941), 19, NYPL archives, *Hadar* collection, *PZX+; Mordecai Katz, op. cit., 13; Mara Propes, "The Last Meeting," op. cit., 27. Epstein would later become a public affairs consultant to the Zionist Organization of America, before his death in 1981.

⁸² Z. H. Wachsman, "America, the Birthplace of the N.Z.O.," op. cit., 30-1.

Succession

Even before Jabotinsky's death, the Jewish far right in Palestine had been undergoing its own fractures and renewals. The Irgun faced a major schism over which of its fights to prioritize: David Raziel, the organization's commander-in-chief who had broken away with the Irgun after joining the Haganah in the wake of the 1929 disturbances, was loyal to Jabotinsky and therefore followed the Revisionists' decision, after World War II broke out, to ally with the British for the sake of defeating Nazi Germany; at the same time, however, a subfaction of the Irgun—led by Avraham (Yair) Stern, who had also joined the Haganah in 1929—believed that the British, as long as they ruled Palestine, continued to be the main enemy.⁸³ In the end, Stern formed a breakaway group, the Lehi (taken from the Hebrew acronym for “Fighters for the Freedom of Israel,” also sometimes referred to as the Stern Gang), that continued to center their war with the British and, to this end, initially made overtures to Nazi Germany.⁸⁴ Stern's brand of Zionism was, according to the historian Joseph Heller, partly responsible for this process: he believed that creating conditions that would effectively force diaspora Jews to leave their homes could be helpful to the “Hebrew freedom movement.” “A Jew-hater can in fact be pro-Zionist,” Stern mused, while “[a] Judeophile may be anti-Zionist.”⁸⁵ This idea was, Heller notes, grounds for “the secret pact [Stern] wanted to reach with Hitler,” which prompted Stern to dispatch one of his operatives, Naftali Lubenchik, to Beirut in late 1940 in order to try and negotiate with a German

⁸³ Raziel had asked Netanyahu, with whom he became friends at university, to join the Irgun delegation to New York, which Netanyahu refused. Pfeffer, *Bibi*, 31. Stern, meanwhile, attempted to form an alliance with the U.S. Irgun delegation, but was rebuffed. Baumel, *Bergson Boys*, '68-70.

⁸⁴ The prospect of an Irgun alliance with Nazi was also on the table at the outbreak of World War II, but quickly disappeared as the Nazi threat grew. Heller, *Stern Gang*, 62.

⁸⁵ Heller, *Stern Gang*, 84.

Foreign Office representative.⁸⁶ The proposal was for the Irgun (really, the Lehi, as Stern's offer glossed over the fact that he was not representing the wider organization) to fight Britain alongside the Nazis, in exchange for Nazi support for a Jewish state in the Middle East "on a national and totalitarian basis, allied with the German Reich."⁸⁷

Sought-after allegiances aside, Heller notes that the Lehi was, ideologically-speaking, part of the most radically-maximalist wing of the Revisionist movement, and therefore firmly in the camp of "the inter-war European radical right"—and, accordingly part of the same lineage of fascist thought that included Ahimeir, Yevin, and Greenberg.⁸⁸ But unlike the other maximalists, who started to back away from their explicitly pro-fascist and pro-Germany leanings once the extent of the Nazis' antisemitism became clear, the Lehi's insistence that Britain was their main enemy persisted—even once the scale of the Holocaust came into focus. And this was not the only point of departure for the Lehi, in particular its leadership: Stern was a staunch religious nationalist, cultivating a messianic vision for a "Kingdom of Israel" that, he believed, could only be ensured by maintaining the purity of Jewish blood through "religious fanaticism."⁸⁹

Jabotinsky's death around the same time of the Lehi's founding allowed Stern's group to capitalize on the "sweeping crisis" that overtook the Revisionists following the loss of their leader.⁹⁰ The reverberations continued to be felt in 1941, when Raziel was killed in action while participating in a British operation in Iraq; the loss of both him and Jabotinsky almost back-to-

⁸⁶ Ibid., 85.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., vii.

⁸⁹ Heller, *Stern Gang*, 93, 114; Perliger and Weinberg, "Jewish Self-Defence," in *Religious Fundamentalism*, 108.

⁹⁰ Heller, *Stern Gang*, 7.

back saw the organization start to drift over the next two years.⁹¹ That would change, in late 1943, when Menachem Begin took over as commander of the organization after defecting from the Polish army and shortly after declared an open rebellion against the British. But until then, the Irgun in Palestine faced a considerable struggle for direction, while losing members to a loss of morale and the lure of the more radical Lehi.

As had previously been the case in the short history of the transnational Jewish far right, however, what was true in Palestine was not necessarily true in the U.S. As the Irgun in the Middle East floundered, its American outpost went from strength to strength: indeed, the Irgun delegation in the U.S. had gained even more independence after Raziel's death, owing to the leadership vacuum before Begin arrived, and was pressing ahead with its activism. By now well-settled in the U.S., the Irgun delegation and NZOA leadership alike were rapidly learning the value of public opinion in achieving political goals in the country, and they were not alone in doing so: then-chairman of the Jewish Agency executive David Ben-Gurion, following his own trip across the Atlantic in late 1940, had also started to appreciate the importance of public relations. Together, the far-right Zionists of the NZOA and the Irgun delegation, and the mainstream Zionists acting on the orders of Ben-Gurion, introduced *hasbara* into the American political discourse—a form of public diplomacy, sometimes veering into propaganda, that sought to plead the case for the establishment (and later actions) of a Jewish state.⁹² Even as the Revisionists' guns may have temporarily quietened in Palestine, then, in the U.S. a new front—

⁹¹ Shilon, *Menachem Begin*, 42-3. It was during this period that Geulah Cohen, who would become one of Lehi's radio announcers on its "Voice of the Hebrew Underground" broadcasts, defected from the Irgun. She and Begin would rejoin forces decades later when she joined his Herut political party.

⁹² Pfeffer, *Bibi*, 32-3.

albeit one fought with words—was being activated. And with Europe’s Jews facing ever-greater catastrophe, their message was about to find a whole new audience.

‘Until our Mother, Eretz Israel, will open her arms to you’

In May 1942, hundreds of Zionists from around the world—including representatives from major American-Jewish institutions—gathered at New York City’s Biltmore Hotel for a conference that ended with a dramatic shift in the Zionist movement’s formal goals. Now, rather than focusing on settlement in Palestine with a vague end vision—the mode of progress most closely associated with Chaim Weizmann—the aim of a Jewish state was explicitly declared for the first time, in conjunction with a stinging critique of the 1939 White Paper, and adopted shortly after by the World Zionist Organization.⁹³ That conference, along with the contemporary reports beginning to trickle into the U.S. about the mass killings of Europe’s Jews, marked a new era of American-Jewish—and particularly Zionist—activism (and, by implication, a rebuttal of Weizmann’s gradualism). This changing climate proved friendlier to aspects of the Jewish far right’s messaging, in particular its campaign for a Jewish army—a state of affairs acknowledged, even if mostly in private, by their establishment rivals.⁹⁴ (The U.S. government, however, began increasing its surveillance of Kook and his groups, in part due to pressure from mainstream American-Jewish outfits; toward the mid-1940s, the FBI sought to tie Irgun delegation activists

⁹³ Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 219.

⁹⁴ See, for example, a ZOA field director’s 1942 letter to ZOA President Louis E. Levinthal, in which he notes that “practically 99% of the people whom I have contacted are...sympathetic of the propaganda stimulated by the [Hillel Kook-led] Committee for a Jewish Army,” and that those same constituencies were unmoved by the idea that the Committee’s work should not be supported because of its Revisionist origins. Saul S. Spiro, Letter to Louis E. Levinthal, November 10, 1942, Central Zionist Archive, F38-52.

both to Irgun gun-smuggling and to communism.)⁹⁵ Revisionist groups in the U.S. also further stepped up their campaigning: the near-moribund NZOA was resuscitated (if never quite brought into rude health) by the installment of Netanyahu at its head, including as editor of *Zionews*. On the back of the newly-founded Committee for a Jewish Army (CJA) in 1941, further Irgun delegation spin-offs emerged, including the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe in 1943, and the Hebrew National Liberation Committee and the American League for a Free Palestine (separate from the American Friends of a Jewish Palestine) in 1944.⁹⁶

Up until the end of the war, all of these groups largely organized their public campaigns around three points that reflected the horrors Nazis were inflicting on European Jewry: Jewish rescue; the push to allow Jews into Palestine (although this was more a campaign of the HNLC and the ALFP—which, unlike the Emergency Committee, were explicitly Zionist groups); and the right of Jews to participate in the fight against Nazism. The CJA told readers of the *New York Times* that “The Jews of Palestine and the stateless Jews of the world do not only want to pray—THEY WANT TO FIGHT!!!!” and, in a mock auction advertisement, declared: “FOR SALE to Humanity, 70,000 Jews.”⁹⁷ The latter notice, referencing 70,000 Jews in Romanian concentration camps whom the Romanians were willing to “let go” to Palestine for a fixed sum, called *Times* readers “part of the collective conscience of America” which it said “has never been found

⁹⁵ Rafael Medoff, “When the US Government Spied on American Jews,” *Midstream*, November 1, 2006, <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/When+the+US+government+spied+on+American+Jews.-a0154866146>.

⁹⁶ Netanyahu had played a key role in convincing Kook and his group to establish the Committee, on the understanding that it would help the campaign get out from under the Revisionist shadow (the new group effectively replaced the AFJP). Netanyahu resigned from the Committee shortly after its founding, owing to his belief that Kook was insufficiently anti-British; he was recruited to lead the NZOA after his departure. Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 70, 79. The group was also known as the Committee for a Jewish Army of Stateless and Palestinian Jews.

⁹⁷ Committee for a Jewish Army, “Jews Fight for the Right to Fight,” *New York Times*, January 5, 1942, http://enc.wymaninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/right_to_fight.jpg.

wanting.”⁹⁸ Recognizing the power of culture to sway public opinion, Ben Hecht—a firebrand playwright, Hollywood screenwriter, and, as a result of meeting Kook, far-right Zionist—wrote and staged, under the auspices of the Kook group, *We Will Never Die*, a play that spanned Jewish history right up to the present day and its Nazi atrocities. His efforts to bring stars into the far-right Zionist fold were greatly complemented by those of Stella Adler, the actor and later famed acting teacher who frequently hosted Irgun delegation meetings in her home and cooked up publicity strategies alongside the men.⁹⁹ With Adler and Hecht’s connections, *We Will Never Die*, which was initially performed in New York City’s Madison Square Garden and then Washington D.C., attracted a combined audience of well over 100,000—including First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and numerous prominent government officials.¹⁰⁰ But the Irgun delegation’s foray into the arts was short-lived (although made a comeback after the war): the success of the play spooked the American-Jewish establishment, which succeeded in having numerous planned performances canceled. Kook’s groups, for now, returned to their original campaign strategies.¹⁰¹

As the slaughter in Europe continued, the Revisionists foregrounded stories of Jewish resistance, even as they acknowledged the devastation being brought upon European Jewry. Betar USA, whose European peers fought alongside members of other Zionist youth groups in the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in a temporary truce, led with that battle as they reported on

⁹⁸ Rafael Medoff, “Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan: Forgotten Pioneer of Jewish Activism,” *Jewish Action* (Fall 2014), accessed January 6, 2022, <https://jewishaction.com/jewish-world/history/rabbi-meir-bar-ilan-forgotten-pioneer-jewish-activism/>.

⁹⁹ The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, “Stella Adler,” *Encyclopedia of America’s Response to the Holocaust*, accessed January 6, 2022, <http://enc.wymaninstitute.org/?p=37>.

¹⁰⁰ “40,000 Crowd Memorial Service in New York for Massacred Jews of Europe,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, March 10, 1943; Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 85; Baumel, ‘*Bergson Boys*,’ 115.

¹⁰¹ Baumel, ‘*Bergson Boys*,’ 118.

Nazi mass murder; as the Holocaust progressed, their journal's pages were filled with frantic reports from Europe alongside stories of Jewish heroism and calls to conquer Palestine.¹⁰² And over at the NZOA, Col. Morris Mendelsohn, the organization's president, drew parallels between these reports and U.S. history, continuing the effort to persuade Americans that the Jewish cause—including the campaign for a state—was also their own.¹⁰³ In his opening address at the 1944 American-British Conference on Palestine, held in New York, Mendelsohn likened the fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto to anti-British militias in the American colonies; invoking Abraham Lincoln, he called on “every liberty-loving American to join with us in a mighty outburst of righteous indignation at [Britain's] pseudo-political chicanery which has made a shambles of the promised Jewish Homeland in Palestine.”¹⁰⁴ The ALFP, meanwhile, took out a full-page advertisement in the *New York Post* to decry the “taxation without representation” suffered by European Jewry—except here, unlike in the American colonies, the “tax” was “property, human dignity, and

¹⁰² See, for example, Brith Trumpeldor USA, “Jews Still Fight on in Poland,” *Betar: Journal of American-Jewish Youth* 1, no. 1 (November 1944), 10, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 8/13.

¹⁰³ This was not Mendelsohn's innovation—Revisionists and mainstream Zionists alike frequently drew parallels between the Zionist and American projects, including their colonial dimensions—highlighting the attendant associations of making “dead” land productive, expanding the boundaries of civilization, and enjoying a special dispensation from God to pursue a national destiny in a putatively “empty” territory. Thus, for example, does a Betar USA pamphlet from the 1940s stress that young Americans “educated in the heritage of the frontier should appreciate the parallel of Israel today with the America of the thirteen colonies,” while Beinesh Epstein, arguing in 1944 for “America's interest in Palestine,” cites a 1929 talk by Louis Brandeis in which the then-Supreme Court justice likened Jewish pioneers in Palestine to American settlers. In Epstein's retelling, Brandeis believed “Arabs, like the Indians...stand in the way of progress, and Jews, like Americans, have to fight against savagery while blazing trails for an onward marching humanity.” Shira Robinson, *Citizen Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel's Liberal Settler State* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013) 54; Brith Trumpeldor of America, “An Old Vision, A New Frontier” (1940s), New York Public Library archives, Betar collection, *ZP-*PWC n. C. 63-68; Beinesh Epstein, “America's Interest in Palestine,” *Zionews* 5, no. 1 (February, 1944), 17, New York Public Library archives, *Zionews* collection, *ZAN-*P562. Such comparisons had been heard in the U.S. before: in 1915, speaking before a New York audience of potential immigrants to Palestine, David Ben-Gurion referred to Palestinian Arabs as “redskins.” Robinson, *Citizen Strangers*, 13.

¹⁰⁴ Col. Morris J. Mendelsohn, “Opening Address,” *The American British Convention on Palestine* (New York, NY: New Zionist Organization, 1944), 3-4, American Jewish Historical Society archives, United Zionists-Revisionists of America collection, I-414.

torrents of blood.”¹⁰⁵ And in early 1945, just before the end of the war on the European front, ALFP treasurer Bryna Ivens Untermeyer wrote to the organization’s supporters to stress how the American “nation, born in a revolution against oppression and tyranny have helped in the past to foster freedom movements” and urged them to “[h]elp free Palestine.”¹⁰⁶

The CJA ceased operations in 1945, its mandate withdrawn with the British government’s formation of a Jewish brigade.¹⁰⁷ But it was merely the precursor to a much wider shift in focus for the American-Jewish far right (and, as we shall see below, their counterparts in Palestine) as World War II finally came to an end, and as support for their movement grew in response to the intensifying battle in Palestine and the uncertain fates of Jewish survivors in Europe.¹⁰⁸ With the fight against the Nazis over, the movement’s depleted numbers rebounded—Betar USA, in particular, had suffered a “virtual extinction” in wartime after much of its membership enlisted following the U.S.’s entry into the war.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, its messaging was finally able to cohere around a single goal—the founding of a Jewish state—that invoked the devastation of the Holocaust while re-emphasizing the movement’s longstanding ideas about sovereignty, power, territory, and nationhood—ideas that, in the postwar global environment, were falling on newly receptive ears. A September 1945 NZOA advertisement in the *New York Post* called on the U.S. government to “stop stalling on Palestine,” and referred to Arabs as “oriental Nazis”; three

¹⁰⁵ American League for a Free Palestine, “Taxation Without Representation—1944,” *New York Post*, July 6, 1944. Central Zionist Archive, American League for a Free Palestine Collection, F25/149.

¹⁰⁶ Bryna Ivens Untermeyer (signed “Mrs. Louis Untermeyer”), Letter to ALFP supporters, March 1945, Central Zionist Archive, American League for a Free Palestine collection, F25/149.

¹⁰⁷ “Committee for a Jewish Army Dissolved As Result of Formation of Jewish Brigade,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, March 23, 1945.

¹⁰⁸ Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 144.

¹⁰⁹ Brith Trumpeldor USA, “The Postwar Kinus of the United States Betar,” report, September 1947, 1, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 6/1.

months later, an ALFP advertisement in the same paper led with the headline “There are no Arabs in Bergen-Belsen,” before describing how an incident of police violence against Jewish survivors still stuck in the camp “occurred not under the Swastika but under the liberating Union Jack.”¹¹⁰ (The latter notice was intended to communicate that the British authorities justified their crackdown on Jews in Palestine by claiming it was necessary to appease the Arab population, but that in the concentration camps of Europe, they had no such excuse.) Betar USA, meanwhile, wrote an open letter to Jewish survivors in Europe acknowledging they were “not with you in the concentration camps,” but promising “not [to] let you down in your fight. We shall help you carry it on until our Mother, Eretz Israel, will open her arms to you.”¹¹¹ In keeping with the feminization of the land, Betarim referred to the “rape of justice” and the “rape of Palestine” in articles decrying the British occupation.¹¹² The organization’s journal also frequently denounced Arabs and the British as allies of the Nazi cause; the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Amin al-Husseini was, one activist asserted, “recently proved responsible for the plan

¹¹⁰ New Zionist Organization of America, “Stop Stalling on Palestine!” *New York Post*, September 11, 1945, American Jewish Historical Society archives, United Zionists-Revisionists of America collection, I-414; American League for a Free Palestine, “There Are No Arabs in Bergen-Belsen,” *New York Post*, December 7, 1945, Central Zionist Archive, American League for a Free Palestine collection, F25/149.

¹¹¹ Brith Trumpeldor USA, “European and American Betarim Pledge Struggle for Zionist Victory; We Shall Not Desert the Yishuv,” *Betar: Journal of Jewish-American Youth* 3, no. 1 (January 1946), 8-9, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 8/13; William B. Ziff, “The First Partition,” *Betar: Journal of Jewish-American Youth* 3, no. 3 (March 1946), 5, op. cit.

¹¹² Brith Trumpeldor USA, “Latest Developments in British Occupied Palestine: Rape of Justice,” *Betar: Journal of Jewish-American Youth* 3, no. 2 (February 1946), 8-9, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Betar collection, Bet 16-8/13. Hebrew plural masculine words usually end in “-im,” hence the plural form of “Betari” here.

for the extermination of European Jewry.” The same article claimed that “‘We want peace’ is an old Nazi refrain, and now we hear it echoing from Arab mouths.”¹¹³

The Irgun delegation also made a fresh foray into the theater world with its sights set firmly on the campaign for a Jewish state. Ben Hecht’s new play, *A Flag is Born*, opened in summer 1946 on Broadway; as with *We Will Never Die*, the production brought in star power, once again with the aid of Stella Adler—with enough tickets sold that the play’s New York run was extended twice.¹¹⁴ One of the stars of *A Flag is Born*, a young Marlon Brando who from then on would be a staunch ALFP supporter, mused that the play—a broad survey of Jewish history, leading up to the Holocaust and the fight for a Jewish state—“touched a sensitive nerve,” with American-Jewish audience members allegedly interrupting performances to express their anguish at their community’s lack of direct action to try and save Europe’s Jews.¹¹⁵ And this time, the mainstream American-Zionist groups—now mindful of their own campaign to press for a Jewish state—did not intervene to shut the play down. Moreover, the impact of *A Flag is Born* went far beyond hearts and minds: ticket sales raised, the ALFP said at the time, almost \$1 million for the organization’s work.

¹¹³ Rachel Lomanitz, “The Arabs Want Peace in Palestine; Hitler Wanted Peace in Europe,” *Betar: Journal of Jewish-American Youth* 3, no. 3 (March 1946), 12, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Betar collection, Bet 16-8/13.

¹¹⁴ Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 155.

¹¹⁵ Baumel, ‘*Bergson Boys*,’ 234; Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 155. Brando’s commitment to the ALFP was not the sum total of his engagement with far-right Zionism—he told daytime talk show host Mike Brown in 1975 of his admiration for Meir Kahane and the Jewish Defense League, while comparing Israelis’ circumstances to those of Native Americans. *The Jewish Times*, December 4, 1975. Jabotinsky Institute archives, Jewish Defense League collection, Kaf 24 - 10/4. Nonetheless, another 20 years after that, Brando’s antisemitic comment about Jews “own[ing]” Hollywood led the JDL to brand him the “Godfather of Hate,” with a personal promise from the group’s then-leader Irv Rubin to make the actor’s life “a living hell.” “Jewish leaders rage at ‘anti-Semitic’ Brando,” *Associated Press*, April 8, 1996, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/jewish-leaders-rage-at-antisemitic-brando-1303943.html>.

Even as the ALFP was striking a communal chord and attracting celebrity endorsements, however, Betar USA was beginning to run into legal and PR difficulties. The Irgun's renewed anti-British campaign in Palestine under Begin prompted speculation in the United States about whether Betar USA, known for its martial outlook, was training American Jews to go and fight with the group in Palestine, and about the legality of the U.S. chapter sending money to the Irgun. On the former point, Betar USA's then-leader Aharon Propes—who had been involved in the movement's founding back in Riga—sought to distance the group from “Palestinian terrorists” while also dissembling about whether they were, in fact, training American Jews to go and fight with the Irgun. Betar USA's mandate was, Propes wrote to the editor of the *New York Daily News*, to “educate the Jewish Youth [sic] in Zionism and to prepare them to be ready to build and defend the country,” and that any decision they might take to “join the underground movement in Palestine” was beyond Betar's control.¹¹⁶ As for the raising and distribution of funds for the Irgun, Betar USA's attorney, Mitchell Salem Fisher, issued an opinion for the group stating that raising funds for the “Jewish resistance movement in Palestine” was legal under federal and New York state law. While planning to go abroad and wage war was indeed an offense, Fisher concluded, “the mere sending of funds from the United States to insurrectionary movements abroad is not a crime.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Aharon Propes, Letter to Abraham Mandel, January 15, 1946, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Betar collection, Bet 16 - 2/5; Aharon Propes, Letter to the editor of the *New York Daily News*, January 14, 1946, op. cit. Despite Propes' prevarication, Betar USA's supporters seemed clear on the organization's mandate: a typical letter from a young admirer professed his appreciation for Betar while admitting he could not imagine himself being smuggled into Palestine to join the Irgun. Later on in the letter, he suggested that the Lehi should have assassinated Chaim Weizmann instead of Lord Moyne, the British minister of state for the Middle East who was shot dead in Cairo in November 1944 by two Lehi operatives. Benson Saler, letter to Aharon Propes, undated, prob. June/July 1946 (Propes responds to Saler on July 17, 1946), Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 2/5.

¹¹⁷ Mitchell Salem Fisher, “Opinion concerning raising of funds in the United States for Jewish resistance movement in Palestine,” February 14, 1946, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Betar collection, Bet 16 - 2/7.

Betar USA's legal and discursive arguments were insufficient, however, to entirely ward off the authorities. The group's identification with the Irgun led, as it had with Kook and his circle, to scrutiny from the U.S. government; in the summer of 1946 the newly-permanent House Un-American Activities Committee briefly turned its gaze on Betar USA, requesting membership rolls and interviewing Propes.¹¹⁸ During a separate meeting with Fisher, HUAC's chief counsel, Ernest Adamson, acknowledged that it was the only Zionist group to be examined at that point, and disclosed that members of Congress had pushed for the investigation—apparently in response to the Irgun's bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem that July, which killed ninety-one people.¹¹⁹ Yet the HUAC investigation was short-lived, and appears to have wrapped up with its receipt of Betar's membership lists. The organization itself, meanwhile, continued to ramp up its activities that summer, sending its New York-based leaders to other major cities across the country to initiate new groups. And at the end of the year, the first group of American Betarim set sail for Palestine—turning the Jewish far right's transatlantic connection, at last, into a two-way street.¹²⁰

Despite Propes' public attempt at distancing Betar USA from the Irgun, the organization itself remained—as did other Revisionist outfits in the U.S.—a firm advocate for the group as its revolt intensified following the end of World War II. Members of Betar USA and the NZOA mobilized against the death sentences handed down by the British Mandate authorities to Irgun

¹¹⁸ Ernie Adamson, Letter to Aharon Propes, July 24, 1946. Jabotinsky Institute archives, Betar collection, Bet 16 - 2/7.

¹¹⁹ Mitchell Salem Fisher, "Memorandum of Conference with Mr Adamson," August 15, 1946, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 2/7. HUAC's investigation of Betar USA began before the King David Hotel bombing.

¹²⁰ "The Post War American Betar," *Hadar* 5, no. 1 (1948), 17-8. Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 8/10.

and Lehi fighters, organizing demonstrations, posting flyers, and memorializing executed Jewish militants. Moshe Arens, a Betar chapter leader, led an invasion of the British Consulate in Boston in protest at the April 1947 execution of Dov Gruner, a member of the Irgun; Betar USA and NZOA activists teamed up for a similar action in New York.¹²¹ Resolutions adopted at a 1947 Betar USA conference expressed support for the Irgun and Lehi alike.¹²² The institutional arm of Revisionism in the U.S., by now called the United Zionists-Revisionists of America (UZRA), established a fund both to advocate for the Jewish state cause and to provide for the families of imprisoned Irgun and Lehi fighters.¹²³ The ALFP stepped up their attempts to not only rationalize, but valorize the violence in Palestine by likening it to the American Revolution—claiming, in pamphlets, posters, articles, and other materials, that “It’s 1776 in Palestine.”¹²⁴ Betar USA, too, sought to appeal to “Freedom Loving Americans” in the language of their own mythology, imploring the “[d]escendants of pioneers and minute-men who threw off the shackles of British tyranny and created a new nation, conceived in liberty” to support “another generation of pioneers and minute-men [who] are fighting British tyranny for the same principle.”¹²⁵ And Ben Hecht, putting pen to paper once more, published under the auspices of the ALFP an open “Letter to the Terrorists of Palestine,” in which he lionized Irgun fighters, slammed mainstream

¹²¹ Medoff, *Militant Zionism*, 176.

¹²² Brith Trumpeldor USA, “The Postwar Kinus of the United States Betar,” 2.

¹²³ Ibid., 178. “Zionist Youths ‘occupy’ British Consulate in New York; Hold Memorial for Executed Jews,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, April 20, 1947.

¹²⁴ See, for example, ALFP Greater NY Council Youth Division, “Z.O.A. Delegates Shame!” flier, undated (prob. 1947), Central Zionist Archive, ALFP collection, F25/149; ALFP, “This Way to Freedom - It’s 1776 in Palestine,” poster, undated. YIVO archives, RG117 Box 52, Folder 1.

¹²⁵ Brith Trumpeldor USA, “Freedom Loving Americans,” flier distributed at rally on September 24, 1947, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 8/2.

American Zionists, and promised that funds were on their way to Palestine. “The Jews of America are for you,” he wrote:

Every time you blow up a British arsenal, or wreck a British jail, or send a British railroad train sky high, or rob a British bank or let go with your guns and bombs at the British betrayers and invaders of your homeland, the Jews of America make a little holiday in their hearts....Not all the Jews, of course....all the heads of nearly all the Jewish organizations whom the American newspapers call—‘the Jewish leaders.’ They’re all against We hear you. We are out to raise millions for you Hang on, brave friends, our money is on its way.¹²⁶

A crisis of victory

Even as the voice of the American-Jewish far right seemed to be louder than ever, however—and more full-throated in its support of its counterparts in Palestine than ever—the Irgun paramilitary was, by 1947, physically and materially depleted, squeezed both by a lack of resources and by British crackdowns.¹²⁷ The group had been intensifying its activities since the end of the war, and even briefly allied with the Haganah and the Lehi in order to present a united fighting front—a

¹²⁶ Ben Hecht, “Letter to the Terrorists of Palestine,” *New York Post*, May 14, 1947, Central Zionist Archive, ALFP collection, F25/149.

¹²⁷ Shilon, *Begin: A Life*, 95.

collaboration brought to a crashing halt by the 1946 King David Hotel bombing.¹²⁸ It continued to attack British targets up and down the land throughout 1947, both as part of its military strategy and in retaliation against the arrest, imprisonment, and execution of its members by the Mandate authorities. And it was in these endeavors that the group attracted some of its most fervent backing from its overseas supporters—and even a degree of sympathy from some of its ideological rivals. But the Irgun was, as the postwar period wore on, under increasing pressure—and to make matters worse, cracks were showing in its relationship with its transatlantic counterparts.

Ideologically-speaking, the Irgun appeared to be hitting many of the same notes as the American delegation during this period. In its underground radio broadcasts it warned of the “establishment of a Jewish reservation” in Palestine, rhetorically linked the British with the Nazis, and warned that talk of partition amounted to “British murderers [being] ready...to dismember the ‘living body’ of our homeland.”¹²⁹ The group also scorned mainstream Jewish leaders for entertaining the idea of partition, accusing them of choosing to “give up our *native land*, give up the greater part of its territory, sacred to the entire nation” and referring to them as “*Judenrat*”—invoking, once more, the by now well-established attack line of comparing intracommunal rivals to Nazis, or at least accusing them of enabling Nazism.¹³⁰ But the apparent

¹²⁸ At the time that the alliance, known as the Jewish Resistance Movement, broke up, Golda Myerson, later Meir, requested that the Lehi shut down its military operations, while distinguishing the group’s “real patriots” from the supposedly more bourgeois and elitist Irgun. Among imprisoned Jewish fighters, alliances were more readily formed between Haganah and Lehi inmates. Shilon, *Begin: A Life*, 102.

¹²⁹ Irgun Tzvai Leumi, “The Voice of Fighting Zion,” broadcast of August 25, 1946, transcript printed in *Betar: Journal of Jewish-American Youth* 3, no. 4 (May-June 1946), 8-9, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 8/8.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10; Irgun Tzvai Leumi, “The Voice of Fighting Zion,” broadcast of September 8, 1946, transcript printed in *Betar: Journal of Jewish-American Youth* 3, no. 4 (May-June 1946), 12, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 8/8.

alignment in the groups' propaganda masked a long-gestating ideological and practical discord between Begin and Kook. Indeed, although Betar USA and Kook's group(s) had a close relationship—with many Betar USA direct actions, such as the aforementioned British embassy invasions and its efforts to organize a boycott of British goods inspired by the Irgun delegation—the same could not be said for the Irgun delegation's relationship with its parent organization in Palestine.¹³¹ This lack of harmony sprung both from the two men's differing understanding of the role of the American branch of the movement, and from their disagreement over how to conceptualize the nation they both claimed to act in the name of. Kook, inspired by the earlier theorizing of Paris-based Betar activist Adolf Gurevitch in the 1930s, and eager to make his campaign into one American Jews could support without threatening their American identity or attracting dual loyalty charges, distinguished between "Hebrews" and "Jews": American Jews, Kook believed, were part of the Jewish religion, while Jews in Palestine, as well as stateless and persecuted Jews around the world, were part of the "Hebrew nation"-in-waiting.¹³² Begin, for his part, made no such distinction.¹³³ Moreover, while Kook understood the Irgun delegation as the "intellectual vanguard" of the Irgun, Begin saw the group as a purely public relations outfit. (As will be seen in the next chapter, however, when the Irgun transitioned into a political party in tandem with Israel's establishment, Begin would indeed come to see the American group as central to its ideological development.) And while Begin and the Palestine leadership of the Irgun

¹³¹ Baumel, *Bergson Boys*, ' 234; Shindler, *Rise of the Israeli Right*, 220-2.

¹³² Baumel, *Bergson Boys*, ' 202-3.

¹³³ Betar also rejected Kook's framework. Brith Trumpeldor USA, "The Postwar Kinus of the United States Betar," 2.

publicly lauded the Irgun delegation's diplomatic efforts, behind the scenes they were bitter at the group's perceived lack of total commitment to the armed struggle in the Middle East.¹³⁴

Divergences over roles and messaging aside, however, a much bigger crisis was brewing for the transnational Jewish far right. In the aftermath of World War II, as Zionist leaders turned to the practical scenarios for the establishment of a Jewish state, the issue of partition reared its head once more. While there was initial widespread opposition in the Yishuv to dividing the land, as the post-war Middle East began to take shape and as the British prepared to depart Palestine, the establishment line became one of resigned acceptance that partition was inevitable.¹³⁵ In the run-up to and following the UN vote on November 29, 1947, to recommend partition—months after the British had referred the issue of Palestine to the newly-formed international body—the Jewish far right campaigned ferociously against the plan, attacking not only the decision-makers but also the mainstream Zionists who, they believed, had traitorously signed over Jewish rights to “Greater Israel.” An NZOA advertisement in the *New York Post* spoke of “mutilations of [the Jewish people's] national territory,” warned that “a partitioned Palestine will become the *most explosive spot on earth*,” and slammed the “old-time appeasers whose defeatist policies brought Zionism and the Jewish people to the present critical situation.”¹³⁶ In a September 1947 “Voice of Fighting Zion” radio broadcast, the Irgun labeled as “Jewish Vichyites” those who had acquiesced to the idea of partition, while a UZRA advertisement in the *New York Times*, written and co-signed by Netanyahu, claimed that partition

¹³⁴ Ibid., 235.

¹³⁵ Shindler, *Rise of the Israeli Right*, 223.

¹³⁶ New Zionist Organization of America, “There Should Be No Third Partition of Palestine!” *New York Post*, June 9, 1947, reprinted in NZOA, *Fighting for a Jewish Homeland* (New York, NY: NZOA, 1947), 55-7.

“would spell the end of the great Zionist dream.”¹³⁷ Days after the UN vote, Betar USA’s leadership wrote a letter to the organization’s members criticizing “defeatist Jewish ‘leadership’ [that] has signed away the Jewish claim to 7/8 of Erets Yisrael at the United Nations,” while recalling opposition to the “dismemberment of our country” following the 1937 Peel Commission report, and calling for “the raising of a generation...that will lead the Jewish people from defeat to victory, from a partitioned ghetto to a Jewish State on both sides of the Jordan.”¹³⁸

Yet even on partition, divergences within the transnational Jewish far right arose. Once more, this discord was crystallized in the figures of Kook and Begin: the former, despite remaining opposed to partition in principle, joined the assent to the plan—stating that should the UN vote to approve it, the Irgun delegation should join with mainstream Zionist institutions and attempt to “‘monitor’ the Zionist leadership from within” while continuing to push a territorially maximalist line.¹³⁹ Begin, on the other hand, remained firmly opposed to partition throughout 1947, and the day after the UN vote published a leaflet in which he refused to recognize the plan, and warned about the further blood that would be shed over the land.¹⁴⁰ This difference of opinions was, alongside the ongoing “ideological struggle” between the American and Palestinian wings of the Irgun, a significant factor in Kook eventually being forced out as leader of the Irgun delegation.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Quoted in Shindler, *Rise of the Israeli Right*, 224; quoted in Pfeffer, *Bibi*, 42.

¹³⁸ Netsivut Betar Beartsot Habrit, Letter to Betarim, December 2, 1947, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 1/2.

¹³⁹ Baumel, *Bergson Boys*, 227-8.

¹⁴⁰ Shindler, *Rise of the Israeli Right*, 226-8; Shilon, *Begin: A Life*, 104.

¹⁴¹ Baumel, *Bergson Boys*, 227-8.

Regardless of the two men's thoughts on the matter—and those of the rest of their movements—partition was, by now, a certainty, as was the withdrawal of the British and, with it, the establishment of the State of Israel. In the face of this reality, even Begin, in the early months of 1948, began to push for the Yishuv to declare independence.¹⁴² On this front, as much as the Jewish far right had lost the battle of partition, they were about to win the war of establishing a Jewish state. Yet that very victory would—perhaps counterintuitively—present the Jewish far right with a challenge it had no precedent for tackling: how to operate within the strictures of formal, and ostensibly democratic, politics. It was the first time in its existence that the transnational Jewish far right had to reckon with the trappings of sovereign power. But it would not be the last.

¹⁴² Shilon, *Begin: A Life*, 111.

Chapter 2: A Road Through the Wilderness

“The last generation of slaves. The first generation of free men.”¹⁴³

This strapline was splashed across the front cover of the June, 1948 edition of *Hadar*, Betar USA’s monthly magazine, along with an adapted logo of the Irgun logo: two bulging arms raised aloft, one brandishing a rifle and the other clutching a torch with “Betar,” in Hebrew, written in its flame. The logo sits inside an outline of “Greater Israel,” with a set of laurels underneath framing the number “25.” The cover sought to convey the historic moment at which the Zionist movement—and in particular Revisionism—found itself: with a newly-created nation-state, and, for Betar in particular, making its twenty-fifth anniversary.

The boldness of the cover ticked many boxes for Betar and the wider Revisionist movement: the predilection for militaristic and muscle-bound aesthetics; the maximalist foundation of the movement’s ideology; the sloganeering; the subtext of strength through violence. But it also masked the fact that with the Zionist movement’s greatest victory so far—a victory that, despite internal enmities, belonged to the transnational far right as well—came two of the Revisionists’ biggest challenges: making the transition from being a self-identified anti-

¹⁴³ Brith Trumpeldor USA, *Hadar* 5, no. 1 (June, 1948), 1, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 8/10.

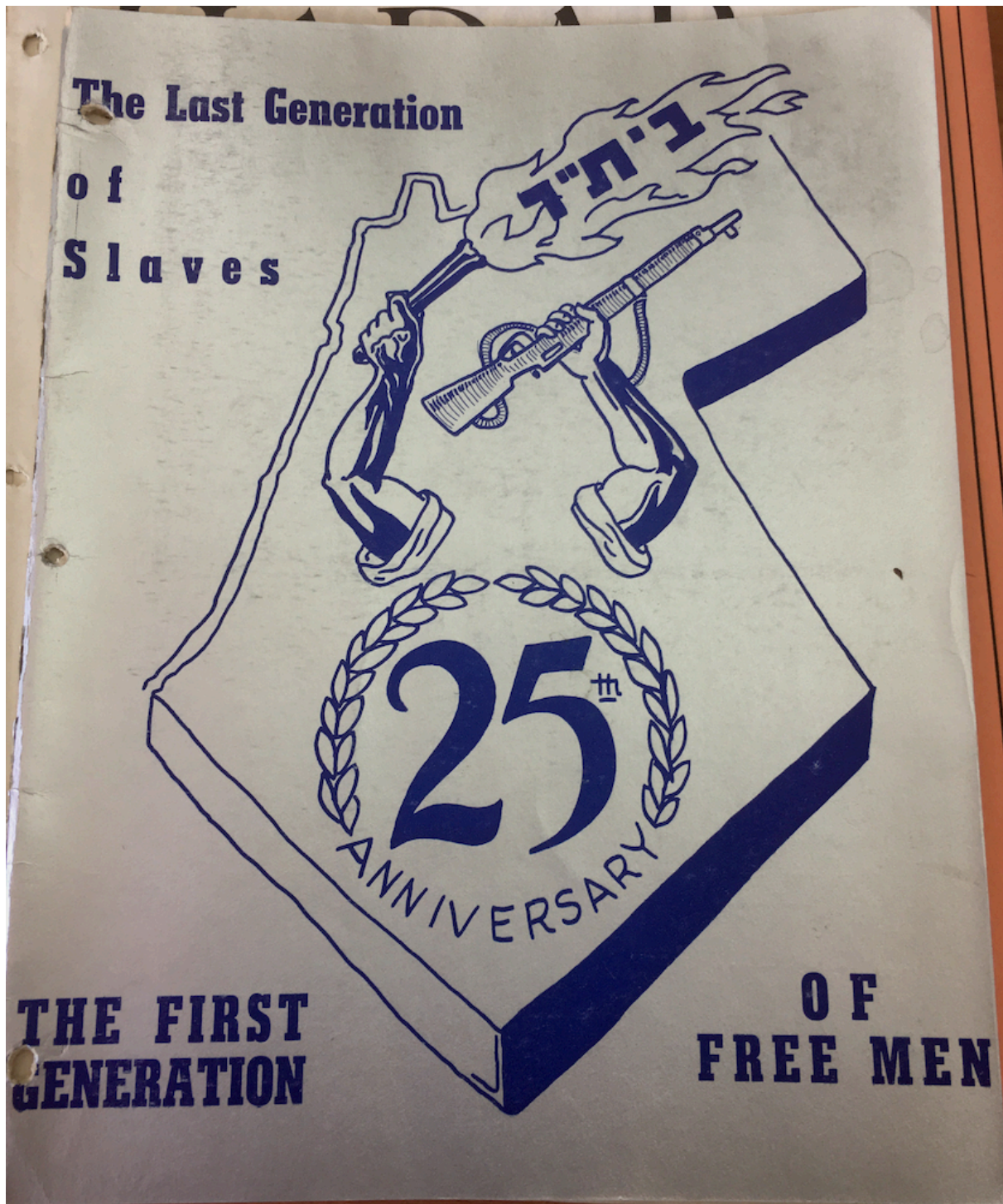


Fig. 2.1: Brith Trumpeldor USA, Front cover of *Hadar* magazine, vol. 5, no. 1, June 1948, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 8/10.

colonialist, partly underground movement that operated outside the confines of formal politics, to having to work within those structures; and how to progress as a transnational movement that had relied so heavily on its American arm, and which now—as per the imperative of liquidating the exile—seemingly had to work toward its own partial obsolescence. To this was added a third challenge, albeit one that provided the far right with one of its key messages now that statehood had been achieved: how to maintain the drive for a homeland that stretched across both sides of the River Jordan, and how to portray partition—the very thing that had helped deliver a Jewish state—as an act of territorial, spiritual, and historical vandalism.

Indeed, in the wake of the establishment of the State of Israel, the transnational Jewish far right would be beset by fraught conversations about its mission, identity, and organization. American Revisionists struggled to impress upon their Israeli counterparts their ongoing relevance to the movement while still remaining in the U.S.; the Israeli far right, now concerned with the trappings of parliamentary procedure, felt that the movement's focus had to be entirely on building political power in the new country. Each branch of the movement, too, faced domestic transitions—for the Americans, the post-war era, and for the Israelis, the state-building era—that greatly complicated both their local and transnational contributions to the movement. For American Jews more broadly, the postwar period saw a stretch of considerable prosperity and assimilation into the American middle class, including intensive suburbanization among many Jewish communities, that, combined with Israel's declaration of statehood, caused a significant slowdown in Zionist activity. For the Revisionists, this translated into constant financial precarity—exacerbated by funds from the worldwide Revisionist movement drying up as the focus turned to Israel—and decimated membership rolls. The decline in personnel was

especially troublesome, undermining a movement already depleted by the departure of many of Revisionism's most charismatic leaders to Israel—some of whom would join Menachem Begin's newly-formed far-right Herut ("Freedom") party, formed out of the Irgun. The initial instinct of senior Revisionists in the U.S. to build up a self-perpetuating program of "*aliyah*"¹⁴⁴ struggled, therefore, to get off the ground, even as its importance was regularly reaffirmed in open letters, military-style orders, and at annual conferences. The intensive debates within the American-Jewish far right during Israel's early years betrayed a fundamental identity crisis—one that spoke to the wider contradictions of a transnational movement whose putative endpoint meant the end of the diaspora. Should their primary contribution be donating funds and material resources to contribute to the upbuilding of the new country, in line with their enhanced comfort and stability during the postwar era? Should they focus on Zionist education and continuing to militate for territorial maximalism while sounding the alarm about assimilation at home? Would it be best to simply adopt a reactive posture, ready to jump to the advocacy needs of Herut (as with, for example, its campaigning against the decision of the first Israeli government, led by David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, to accept German reparations?) Or should they pour all their efforts into getting as many American Jews as possible, Revisionists above all, to pack up and move to Israel? Within those questions lay a collision between vision and reality: on the one hand, the belief that it was time to, essentially, "wind down" the diaspora; and on the other, the understanding that moving American Betarim, and American Jews more broadly, into a place of being ready and able to leave their old lives behind and start afresh in a new country, demanded a substantial and intensive investment in institutions, education, and grassroots activism. The

¹⁴⁴ Jewish immigration to Israel.

dream of negation, in other words, could only be advanced by entrenching the very structures and communities they were trying to dissolve. The American-Jewish far right would wrestle with these internal contradictions for decades, stymying its growth as it struggled to articulate a coherent vision and mode of action with which to win new adherents to its cause.

The Israeli far right, meanwhile, was grappling with its own conundrums. The most immediate and obvious struggle was the fight for political power against a Labor-Zionist apparatus that had already locked down its hegemonic status during the pre-state era. Herut retained the cachet of its now ex-Irgun fighters' exploits during the struggle for statehood, but every piece of social, political, and industrial infrastructure was in the hands of the Labor Zionists. The Revisionists simply did not have the governing and organizational experience that their foes did, and the ruling Mapai party—a socialist-Zionist outfit that already had nearly two decades of Yishuv governance under its belt, and which would comfortably win Israel's first election in 1949—was not about to give it to them: for one thing, they had no need to relinquish any part of their monopoly, and more than that, the two groups were bitter enemies. They had long habitually traded accusations of fascism and mutually believed that their opponents would derail the project of establishing and then building up the fledgling state, and although Ben-Gurion and Begin struck a controversial agreement in March 1948 for the Irgun to be folded into the Haganah (which would shortly become the Israeli Defense Forces), two incidents just before and just after the founding of the state further poisoned the relations between the Revisionists and Labor Zionists, while making clear that the divisions between them would not so easily be overcome.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ "Agreement Reached on Jewish Cabinet; Ratification of Haganah-Irgun Pact Postponed," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, March 11, 1948; Shilon, *Menachem Begin*, 118-9.

The first episode took place in April 1948, when Irgun and Lehi forces massacred over a hundred Palestinian residents of Deir Yassin, a village located near Jerusalem, in a capture operation that had been approved by a Haganah commander.¹⁴⁶ The affair was blamed on insufficient planning and lack of equipment, although it was also acknowledged that the fighters themselves had lost control (the commander of the Lehi contingent, Amos Kenan, having apparently been wounded at the start of the action, allegedly “killed every arab [sic] he saw,” one of his peers recounted years later).¹⁴⁷ Yet the fallout led to both the Revisionists and the Labor Zionists, along with other Yishuv institutions such as the Jewish Agency, trading barbs—with the latter pointing to the immorality of an organization that would carry out such a massacre, and the former accusing the Labor Zionists of a deceitful representation of the incident, given one of their own had greenlit the operation.¹⁴⁸ (This followed a similar pattern to the 1946 bombing of the King David Hotel, which had originally been jointly planned by the Haganah, the Irgun, and Lehi, during a period of rare cooperation; after the attack, which killed ninety-one people, the Haganah ended its alliance with the other two groups.) Despite the Haganah’s involvement in

¹⁴⁶ Shilon, *Menachem Begin*, 106-7.

¹⁴⁷ Nissan Teman, Letter to Yisrael Winkelman, November 4, 1971, Jabotinsky Institute archive, Gimel 16 - 2/10/1. Teman was the then-head of Betar USA’s national leadership; Winkelman—now Medad—was a Betar activist and future Knesset aide to Geulah Cohen. Kenan joined the Israeli army shortly after the massacre, and went on to become a renowned sculptor. The recollection came from Aharon Amir, who had been involved with both the Irgun and Lehi.

¹⁴⁸ Shilon, *Menachem Begin*, 107; Tom Segev, *1949: The First Israelis* (New York, NY: Henry Holt & Company, 1998), 25; Shindler, *Rise of the Israeli Right*, 232. Certainly much of the debate at the time, and the historiography that followed it, zeroed in on the supposedly unique disregard for [Palestinian] life displayed by the Irgun and Lehi, a charge that is unequivocally not borne out by the wider history of Israel’s establishment. The broader attitudes are perhaps best summed up—if unwittingly—by Ron Schiller, a correspondent for the Americans for Haganah-published *Israel Speaks*, rebranded from *Haganah Speaks*, who wrote disparagingly of the nascent IDF’s lack of propaganda efforts. “[T]here is an utter lack of appreciation in the middle and lower levels of [army] officialdom as to the importance of public relations and favorable world opinion,” Schiller wrote to David Wohl, head of AFH, shortly after Israel’s founding. “Their idea is ‘News stories—even favorable ones—don’t kill any Arabs.’ Of course, they’re wrong as hell.” Cited in David Wohl, Letter to Teddy Kollek, June 23, 1948, Central Zionist Archive, Americans for Haganah collection, F41/72.

Deir Yassin, the opposition from Labor Zionists to the accord between Ben-Gurion and Begin was renewed in the wake of the killings.¹⁴⁹

The second episode involved an arms-laden ship—with both the vessel and its cargo acquired by the Irgun, including the U.S. delegation—that landed on the northern Israeli coast in June 1948, before making its way down to Tel Aviv. Once there, the *Altalena*—whose weaponry the Irgun wanted to distribute solely among its members, rather than across all Israeli army units—became the subject of a heated dispute between Irgun and IDF commanders and, more broadly, between the Revisionists and the government. In the end, Ben-Gurion ordered the shelling of the ship, which killed sixteen people on board. The incident would go down in the annals of the Jewish far right as a testament to the Labor Zionists’ supposedly deranged antipathy toward their rivals, and, at the time, provoked calls among some Irgun leaders to bring down the Israeli government.¹⁵⁰

In some ways, this ideological battle was business as usual for the far right: it had always identified the socialist and communist left as an existential threat to both its own project and to Jews in general. But with the founding of the state, the arena of that struggle had shifted suddenly and drastically, and the Labor Zionists had the upper hand. Yet the transition to a power struggle that now revolved around the structures and formalities of parliamentary politics posed other quandaries for the Israeli far right, which were related but less immediately visible: how to distinguish itself ideologically, and how to uphold its radical heritage, amid the new state’s rapidly-crystallizing norms.

¹⁴⁹ Shilon, *Menachem Begin*, 118-9;

¹⁵⁰ “Irgun Leaders Call for the Overthrow of the Israeli Government,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, June 24, 1948.

Its struggle on both these fronts would be the driver of much of the evolution, and the eventual political and social success, of the Israeli far right over the decades to come. Yet even in the state's opening years, two models for the movement's development began to emerge. The first was that as the far right experienced crises—either through repeated electoral failures or through perceived setbacks to their political and social projects—pressure would emerge from below, in the form of grassroots mobilization, to try and effect change outside the confines of parliamentary politics. As we shall see below and in later chapters, the earliest of these groups made little impact, but later iterations would have far-reaching effects on Israeli politics. The second model, meanwhile, involved reinscribing and reasserting the far right's ideological specificities—particularly surrounding territory, ethnicity, religion, and gender—when surrounded by political parties that, at times, expressed similar values to the far right on these issues. Israel's early years were, after all, characterized by the majority of the Zionist parties “actively fusing the principle of Jewish nativism in the institutions and laws of the State of Israel,” as the Israeli political scientist Ami Pedahzur has observed, while Herut was far from alone in seeking to push out the country's borders from where they lay in 1948.¹⁵¹ Ben-Gurion, during and immediately after the 1948 war, was consistently taken with maximalist ideas, writing in his diary about “finish[ing] off Transjordan” and bombing Cairo and Syria; a few months after the cessation of hostilities, he suggested to his cabinet that Israel “attack the Arab Legion and

¹⁵¹ Ami Pedahzur, *The Triumph of Israel's Radical Right* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 27. Pedahzur also cites, but takes issue with, Sammy Smooha's assertion that the automatic nativism of Zionist parties inhibited the growth of a radical right after the foundation of the state. Sammy Smooha, “HaMishtar Shel Medinat Yisrael: Democratia Ezrahit, I-Democratia, O Democratia Etnit?” [“The State of Israel's Regime: A Civil Democracy, a Non-Democracy, or an Ethnic Democracy?”], *Israeli Sociology* 2, no. 2 (2000). Pedahzur counters that the binding of nativism into the law of the land, and Israel's status as what he calls an “ethnic democracy,” in fact provided fertile ground for the growth of the radical right, with nativist ideas and practices “fully embedded in the dominant political culture and are manifested on a daily basis in governmental practices.” Pedahzur, *Triumph of the Radical Right*, 29.

occupy all of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Hebron.”¹⁵² The cabinet voted the idea down, which Ben-Gurion would later declare a “fatal error.”¹⁵³ Even in moments where he seemed to move away from maximalism, at least publicly, Ben-Gurion couched his ostensibly more moderate position in the language of violent demographic engineering. In one telling exchange, while defending himself against Herut’s charges of abandoning the territory east of the River Jordan, Ben-Gurion—in a grim irony—reminded Begin’s party of the Irgun and Lehi massacre at Deir Yassin that caused so many Palestinian Arabs to flee, claiming that “a Jewish state without Dir Yassin [sic] can exist only by the dictatorship of the minority.”¹⁵⁴

Indeed, much as before the founding of the state, the masculinist and militaristic impulses of the far right were not theirs alone. “Contemptuous” attitudes toward diaspora Jews, and the stereotypes surrounding their perceived weakness, reluctance to fight, and supposedly feminine traits, were commonplace across the political spectrum.¹⁵⁵ Jewish immigrants who held fast to their diaspora traditions were seen as forgoing the (masculine) new Jewish collective of the Israeli nation, and instead “adher[ing] to memories of home and the family—the space of the women.”¹⁵⁶ Amid all the talk of “eliminating” the diaspora, the head of the Jewish Agency’s emigration arm made a “significant slip of the tongue” when he referred to “eliminating the Jews” at a 1949 organizational conference.¹⁵⁷ And Holocaust survivors, in particular, were the

¹⁵² Segev, *1949*, 14.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Robinson, *Citizen Strangers*, 31.

¹⁵⁵ Segev, *1949*, 117; Gertz, “I Am Other,” 222.

¹⁵⁶ Gertz, “I Am Other,” 222.

¹⁵⁷ Yosef Barpal at a conference of directors in Paris, March 3, 1949, Central Zionist Archive, 12413/C. Cited in Segev, *1949*, 118.

objects of both shame and scorn, treated as a reminder of both the subjugation of exile and the supposed submissiveness that made them go “like sheep to the slaughter”; in a derogatory reference to apocryphal rumors of practices at Nazi death camps, Israelis sometimes referred to survivors as *sabonim* (soaps).¹⁵⁸

These ideological convergences between the right and the left by no means fully undercut the far right’s claims to be holding the line on communal or territorial integrity; nor did they leave the far right bereft of issues upon which to campaign. As we shall see later, there were plenty of moments during Israel’s early years—from matters surrounding intracommunal tensions to economic and geopolitical policy making—when Begin was able to adopt an agitational opposing stance to Ben-Gurion and his ruling coalition, in an effort to reinvigorate and reassert his movement’s identity. And in later years, as the coming chapters will explore, those same overlapping values would provide ample ammunition for the far right, when faced with accusations of racism and excessive militarism, to charge their centrist and left-wing opponents with hypocrisy.

Nonetheless, these at-times permeable ideological boundaries between the far right and much of the rest of Israel’s political spectrum fed into the wider uncertainty surrounding the movement’s mandate in the statehood era—a lack of clarity that was rooted in Israel, but which percolated into the diaspora. As the years wore on; as Labor Zionists’ dominance seemed to grow ever-more intractable; and as the realities of upbuilding and stabilizing a new country set in—the absorption of waves of immigrants; the fragile economy; the looming threat of conflict; the lack of basic materials and services—the far right in both countries continued to lack both an

¹⁵⁸ Ian Lustick, “The Holocaust in Israeli Political Culture: Four Constructions and Their Consequences,” *Contemporary Jewry* 37, (2017), 131.

animating cause and, certainly in the U.S., the numbers to effect meaningful change domestically and transnationally. And with so much focus on maintaining the integrity of the territory already under Israeli control, the far right's main cause—expansion—faded into the background. Even as Herut and its future iterations painstakingly tried to grow its vote share, it remained unable, during Israel's first two decades, to break the Labor Zionist grip on power, while Revisionism's various American outfits faded into obscurity. As the twentieth anniversary of Israel's founding approached, the transnational far right seemed no closer to figuring out its mission and relevance in the shadow of statehood. The movement would, as at its inception, need a crisis to spur its next phase.

'The Irgun, in respectable dress'

On May 15, 1948, Menachem Begin, in his final act as commander of the Irgun, delivered an hour-long address over the organization's underground radio channel. Speaking the day after the establishment of the State of Israel, Begin announced that he was disbanding the Irgun and creating a political party, Herut, which was in effect formed out of the militia. His goal was for the party to revolve around, but not be exclusively made up of, Irgun personalities and principles. And it seemed, initially, as if the American wing of the Revisionists would enjoy a prestigious role in this new phase of the movement: Begin saw the Irgun delegation in the U.S. as the "intellectual elite" of the organization, and offered them central roles in the new party.¹⁵⁹ Eri Jabotinsky, son of Vladimir, Hillel Kook (having reverted from "Peter Bergson"), Aryeh Ben Eliezer, and Samuel (Shmuel) Merlin were all offered slots on Herut's inaugural election list, and

¹⁵⁹ Shilon, *Menachem Begin*, 112-14.

returned to the Middle East after their years of service in the U.S. But although they would indeed compete in Israel's first Knesset elections the following year, and end up sitting in parliament as Herut Knesset members, ideological cracks between the Revisionist movement's homeland and diaspora arms began to show almost immediately, now that the pre-state goals of ousting the British and founding the country had been achieved.

For one thing, in keeping with their ongoing disagreement on the nature of Jewish belonging, Kook's articulation of a Hebrew national identity, as opposed to a Jewish one, ran directly counter to Begin's continued emphasis on Jewish tradition. Although Begin connected the word "Hebrew" with the idea of the "New Jew," he nonetheless saw Judaism as the glue of communal identity. Kook, on the other hand, thought that a religiously-rooted identity would become "redundant and outdated" following Israel's establishment.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, there was something of a power struggle between the movement's Israeli and American branches: the Irgun's U.S. headquarters had understood itself to be the group's "political body" during the fight for statehood, while Begin saw it as "more of a public relations and fund-raising" arm, and therefore not the outfit to chart Herut's political roadmap.¹⁶¹ And from its diaspora vantage point, the American branch of the Irgun also had a different take on foreign policy, believing—in keeping with the U.S.'s postwar swivel to a defensive Cold War posture—that Herut should align itself with the West versus the Soviet Union. Begin, by contrast, wanted to remain neutral in

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 114.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 132.

order to differentiate Herut from a splinter political faction that had formed upon the state's founding, and which had sought an alliance with the U.S.¹⁶²

Begin's stance on the U.S. did, however, shift at the end of 1948, with his first American tour as Herut leader—a visit that was vociferously protested by over two dozen Jewish luminaries, including Hannah Arendt and Albert Einstein, whose open letter to the *New York Times* likened Herut to “the Nazi and Fascist parties,” and cited the Deir Yassin massacre as evidence.¹⁶³ Undeterred, Begin told a Manhattan rally later that month that the “Third Temple” would be built in their generation, and that only “Jewish blood will determine the boundaries of Eretz Israel.”¹⁶⁴ At the same rally, former Irgun commanders issued a call to American Jews to “help reconquer all of Eretz,” and “promised to eventually throw the enemy out of all the Holy Land.”¹⁶⁵ Yet despite these verbal assurances that American Jews had a role to play now Israel had been established, and despite Begin's more pro-U.S. orientation following his trip and the presence of members of the Irgun delegation in his party, he—and the rest of the Israeli far right—continued to have underlying doubts about the importance of American Revisionists in the post-state reality. This challenge would, as we shall see, weigh heavily on the American-Jewish far right as it struggled with its own mission in the coming years.

¹⁶² That party, which named itself after “the Jabotinsky movement,” failed to make the Knesset in the 1949 elections, and merged with Herut two years later. *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 135; Isidore Abramowitz et al, “New Palestine Party,” *New York Times*, December 4, 1948.

¹⁶⁴ Although Begin did not explicitly say as much during his address, the understanding among the Jewish far right is that any future “Third Temple” would be built where the first two Temples stood—that is, on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem's Old City, where Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock currently stand.

¹⁶⁵ “Jewish Blood Will Determine Boundaries of Eretz, Beigin [sic] Declares,” *Tel Hai*, December 17, 1948.

In the immediate term, Begin and Herut's priority was a strong showing at Israel's first elections, set for January 1949. Many of the terms of the debate had been established during the first decades of the Revisionists' bitter enmity with the Labor Zionists (see ch. 1); this translated directly into Herut's campaign messaging, which also played into the Irgun's self-identity as a liberation movement. Its fliers decried "economic monopolies" and promised the party would continue the "tradition of the War of Liberation" (meaning the 1948 war), while valorizing those Herut candidates who had spent time in British jails. The party vowed to fight for "individual rights," and, in a populist twist introduced by Begin, presented itself as a party of "the people" rather than of the bourgeoisie, which is how it branded Mapai. And territorial maximalism remained central to the party's identity and policy goals: its campaign slogan, "Moledet v'Herut" ("Homeland and Freedom"), was accompanied by a party logo strikingly similar to that of the Irgun, with an outline of Greater Israel overlaid by an arm clutching a rifle. Many of its campaign materials, too, bore the line "Issued by the Herut Movement—the establishment of the National Military Organization [Irgun]"—juxtaposing, somewhat awkwardly, the party's anti-establishment and underground origins with its abrupt pivot to statecraft.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, as the London *Jewish Chronicle* pithily reported in September 1948, Herut was essentially "[t]he Irgun, in respectable dress...with two main policies that appeal to its mixed following: a greater Israel and a smaller income tax."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Herut, "Brothers in the Battlefield, the Gallows, and Victory," National Library of Israel, 1st Knesset Election Campaign Materials, accessed August 30, 2022, https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/Hebrew/collections/treasures/elections/elections_materials/Pages/elect_ephemera_1949.aspx; Herut, "Social-Economic Policy Platform," op. cit.; Herut, Untitled electoral campaign flier, op. cit.; Shilon, *Menachem Begin*, 134-5.

¹⁶⁷ "Irgun 'Captures' Revisionists," *Jewish Chronicle*, September 28, 1948, National Archives [UK], Irgun collection, KV5/39.

In the end, Herut's efforts to weld a coherent political platform and identity out of its myriad faces—the secular and religious, the populist and anti-socialist, the renegade and statesmanlike—failed to make much of a dent in the Labor-Zionist vote. Its messaging about needing to expand the country's borders, and its warnings that Mapai would give up Jerusalem, despite growing anxiety around the issue among the Israeli public, did not register either.¹⁶⁸ Herut pulled in just eleven percent of ballots, with other far-right groups—an ex-Lehi outfit and the aforementioned Revisionist Party—winning one seat and failing to pass the electoral threshold, respectively.¹⁶⁹ In sum, it amounted to a trouncing of the Israeli-Jewish far right, which made clear the vast challenges that lay ahead if it was to win over the Israeli electorate. For all the admiration the Irgun had won for its activities in the struggle for statehood—plaudits that stretched across the political spectrum, notwithstanding the underlying ideological divides between the center-left and the right—it did not have the track record of holding, and wielding, power that the Labor Zionist parties had. Building domestic power was, then, the paramount—and existential—concern for the Israeli-Jewish far right. This focus would have a detrimental impact on both the American-Jewish far right—itsself at a crossroads—and on the transnational relationship. But while the Israeli far right at least had an iconic figurehead to coalesce around, the American movement was, with the return of its leaders to the Middle East, rudderless, encapsulating the structural problems of a post-1948 Zionist movement.¹⁷⁰ And in the new

¹⁶⁸ Shilon, *Menachem Begin*, 143. Public sentiment on the future of Jerusalem was running so high, the *Jewish Chronicle* reported, that “were the Government [sic] to agree to any proposal leaving the city outside the Jewish state, Begin's supporters would double in number overnight.” “Irgun ‘Captures’ Revisionists,” *Jewish Chronicle*.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 144. Eri Jabotinsky, Kook, and Merlin all became Knesset members, but Jabotinsky and Kook would both leave to become independent MKs during their term.

¹⁷⁰ Betar USA, Letter to American Betarim in Israel, December 27, 1948, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - 2/17.

postwar and post-state reality, the world—and the American-Jewish community with it—was moving on.

A people with a land

In the aftermath of Israel's declaration of independence, the American-Jewish far right—while celebrating the moment—faced an immediate question: what, now that statehood had been achieved, was its role both domestically and transnationally? What did Revisionist leaders in Israel expect from the movement's American-Jewish rank and file post-statehood? Would their primary role remain, as it had been during the war, to drum up resources and political support at home, or would it be—as New York-born senior Betar official and former Irgun member David Krakow, quoting Jabotinsky, told an *Altalena* memorial audience in June—to “liquidate the Galuth [before] the Galuth...liquidate[s] you”?¹⁷¹ Certainly, the now-Israeli leaders of the far-right movement sent mixed signals, both as to their expectations of their American counterparts, and their assessment of their importance as the Israeli wing tried to acquire political power.

Nathan Friedman-Yellin (later Yellin-Mor), one of the leaders of Lehi, wrote an open letter to the group's American supporters in the weeks following Israel's establishment; in it, he vowed that the fight for territorial expansion would continue, while castigating American Zionists for focusing on raising and donating money. Condemning American-Jewish activism thus far as having “degenerated into a half-philanthropic, half-social venture,” Friedman-Yellin demanded both bodies and donations, imploring his supporters to “Come to our assistance! Send us your sons and daughters. Send your financial support on an unprecedented scale.” The specter of

¹⁷¹ “Joint Betar-Revisionist Rally for Victims of Altalena Exposes Ben-Gurion,” *Tel Hai!*, July 2, 1948, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 8/5.

destruction hung heavily over Friedman-Yellin's sign-off: "[W]e are bound to meet as Jews," he wrote. "It is up to us whether we shall meet at the entrance to gas chambers or in a great and free Homeland."¹⁷² Begin, meanwhile, was fully occupied with both the fallout from the *Altalena* incident and the effort to build up his political party; even as this immediate moment passed, however, he would remain unconvinced about the importance of American Jews to either the far-right political project or the broader state-building project, as we shall see below.

Nonetheless, seeking to immediately capitalize on the energy of Israel's founding moment, the Betar USA leadership, within days of the declaration, wrote an open letter to members that reaffirmed the movement's primary mission, as well as the role of American (and all other diaspora) Jews in that vision. The need to conquer "all of Eretz Yisrael," the letter declared, remained paramount, and in that task the movement was still "at the beginning of the road." The leadership promised that "Betar all over the world will place itself at the disposal of the rising Jewish state, and the duty of aliyah will be converted into the duty of service in the Jewish liberation army in the fatherland."¹⁷³ To that end, planning began straightaway on the establishment of an "American Betar settlement" on the banks of the River Jordan. In line with the wider imperative of "strategic hityashvut" ("settlement") that occupied the minds of the Revisionists in the early years, this new community would sit close to Israel's not-yet-formalized borders as a security bulwark that would absorb potential attacks from countries with which Israel remained at war, while also stretching the outer bounds of its newly-conquered territory as

¹⁷² Nathan Friedman-Yellin, Letter to members of American Friends of the Freedom Fighters of Israel, June 20, 1948, Central Zionist Archive, American Friends of Lehi collection, F25/184.

¹⁷³ Betar USA, Open letter to members, May 1948, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - 2/17.

far as possible.¹⁷⁴ This experimental settlement was Ramat Raziel, established on the land of the depopulated Palestinian village of Kasla, which the Palmach had conquered in July 1948. Named after the deceased Irgun leader David Raziel, the community was founded by ex-Irgun militants, including Americans, who were joined by a further group of American Betarim in 1949, with Moshe Arens—who was part of Betar USA’s wartime leadership—joining shortly after, upon his return from the U.S.¹⁷⁵ Yet a divide in the settlement emerged immediately, with some—chiefly Holocaust survivors—wanting to simply settle down and live their lives, while others wanted to use the settlement to continue driving Betar’s mission forward.¹⁷⁶

Eventually, the Americans at the settlement left to establish their own community—the first really American Betar colony in Israel—nearby, dependent upon receiving a parcel of land from the Jewish Agency.¹⁷⁷ That settlement, Mevo’ot Betar, located in the depopulated Palestinian village of Ras Abu ‘Amar, near Jerusalem, came to embody many of the struggles of the transnational Jewish far right. Beyond the local political contests which delayed its land allocation from the Jewish Agency—the socialist Zionist youth group Hashomer Hatzair had, apparently, campaigned to try and deny the “Fascist” Betar a spot near their kibbutzim, an issue that was apparently only resolved with the intervention of American Betar officers—Mevo’ot

¹⁷⁴ Moshe Marden, Open letter to Betar USA members, September 1948, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - 2/17.

¹⁷⁵ Reuven Kaplan, “Our Furrows Lead to Amman,” *Untitled Betar publication [possibly Spirit of Altalena]*, July 26, 1949, 6, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - 8/23. Kaplan, also known as “Ray,” had been recruited to Betar by Moshe Arens while at university in Massachusetts and worked his way up to become part of the National Executive of Betar USA. He was among the founding members of Ramat Raziel. Yisrael Medad, “Ray Kaplan z”l,” *Betarim in North America*, December 2, 2018, <https://betarimna.blogspot.com/2018/12/ray-kaplan-zl.html>.

¹⁷⁶ Kaplan, “Our Furrows,” 6-8.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

Betar was also beset by a lack of funds, materials, and personnel.¹⁷⁸ There had been high hopes for the settlement—Reuven Kaplan, a senior American Betari who was a founding member of both Ramat Raziell and Mevo’ot Betar, determined the establishment of the latter to be a significant development for Betar USA, in that it would “provide a really close tie between the Snif [branch] in the United States and our Betarim in Aretz [Israel].”¹⁷⁹ Explicitly tying the founding of Mevo’ot Betar—and proposed future settlements like it—to the furtherance of Betar’s mission and the expansion of Israel’s borders, Kaplan envisaged a transnational exchange of resources that would be anchored by these new communities: people, money, and goods flowing from the U.S. to Israel, and the “wealth of knowledge” learned by the American settlers making its way back over the Atlantic via emissaries that would be periodically sent to the U.S. The hope, for Kaplan and other American Betar leaders, was that this would lead to a self-perpetuating settlement movement, in which those newly-trained American Betarim would themselves emigrate (and, before doing so, help with appeals for basic materials to be sent over to the settlements), found new Betar communities, and commence the transnational exchange cycle anew.¹⁸⁰

The push to establish and make sustainable Ramat Raziell, Mevo’ot Betar, and other Betar settlements was part of a wider, and at times fraught, debate happening within the American Revisionist movement about its purpose, place, and impact in the post-statehood era, as well as how its various arms would operate transnationally now that statehood had been achieved. The

¹⁷⁸ Joseph Beder, “Some Facts About Mevo’ot Betar,” *Our Way: Informational Bulletin of the Friends of Mevo’ot Betar*, January 1951, 2, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - 21.

¹⁷⁹ Kaplan, “Our Furrows,” 10.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 10. Beder, “Some Facts,” 8-9.

stakes of this conversation, and the myriad challenges the wider Revisionist movement faced, became starkly apparent at the first post-1948 Betar *Kinus Olami* (international conference), which took place in Tel Aviv in May 1949 and which brought together Betar chapters from across the globe. In his report on the conference, Betar USA head Simcha Rosenberg—who had taken over from Moshe Arens upon the latter’s return to the Middle East—acknowledged the “paradoxical” fact that the first Betar gathering to take place in the wake of statehood was not also “the most glorious and triumphant of all Kinusim.”¹⁸¹ Rather, he wrote, there was an air of “grimness” and “resignation about the future of Betar.” Much of this defeatist air, Rosenberg explained, was down to uncertainty about the organizational hierarchy of the global Revisionist movement, now that Herut was to be the focal point for political activism: it had, until the convention, been unclear whether Betar would “belong” to Herut or to the United Zionist-Revisionists, the global institutional Revisionist movement. This question had, as internal discussions between Betar, Begin, and the United Zionist-Revisionists show, arisen almost as soon as statehood was declared.¹⁸² To these tensions were added further grievances about the breakdown in communication between Betar leaders around the world and the Irgun—and then Herut—high command, further illustrating the mismatched perceptions between the homeland and the diaspora over the importance of the latter now that statehood had been achieved.

Indeed, beyond Betar’s institutional affiliation, there was also the question of what the role of Betarim—and their fellow American Revisionists—would be in the new Jewish state, and whether there was even a place for them at all. Begin had, in the wake of founding Herut,

¹⁸¹ Simcha Rosenberg, “The Kinus Olami,” *Untitled Betar publication [possibly Spirit of Altalena]*, July 26, 1949, 3, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - 8/23.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 3; Betar USA, “Special Announcement of the Netzivut,” December 19, 1948, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - 21.

declared that mass “*aliyah*” from the U.S. was neither desirable nor achievable, with the priority instead being to bring Jews over from Eastern Europe.¹⁸³ Betar USA naturally disagreed with his assessment, but also struggled to challenge it convincingly. The branch’s leaders expressed their fears that fundraising for a political party would fail to galvanize potential donors in the way that the Irgun’s semi-covert arms drives had, and they were right: a fundraising campaign launched in October 1948 substantially underperformed, raising only \$3,500 out of a hoped-for \$10,000 haul. Such realities undermined the proposal, floated after Herut’s establishment, to set up a U.S.-based pro-Herut outfit with publicity, fundraising, and youth arms (the last of which would include Betar).¹⁸⁴

All these concerns were placed front and center at the 1949 Betar convention—which made it clear, Rosenberg wrote, that there needed to be a wholesale “rebuilding” of Betar. To that end, the delegates reached two main agreements. The first, responding to Betar’s institutional affiliation, was that it would remain an “independent Zionist Youth Organization” that would nonetheless work closely with Herut and the United Zionist-Revisionists—in other words, straddling the transnational divide between the homeland and the diaspora, respectively. Indeed, Rosenberg noted, the conference attendees reflected on the three groups’ shared ideological aims —”Shleimut HaArtez” [sic] (“wholeness of the land”) and “Shleimut HaAm” (“wholeness of the people”)—while acknowledging that, given Betar’s need to focus on Zionist education of Jewish youth, “close organizational ties with a parliamentary party in Israel with its many complexities

¹⁸³ Betar USA, Letter to American Betarim in Israel, December 27, 1948, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - 2/17. The letter promised to be the first of a regular series of correspondence updating American Betarim in Israel about Betar USA’s activities and developments in the movement.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

would be ill-advised.”¹⁸⁵ With that in mind, the task at hand for Betar was to figure out how to walk the line between cleaving to the wider Revisionist movement’s political and ideological goals, while justifying its continued existence as a discrete transnational organization with its own structure, hierarchy, and mode of action. The answer, for Rosenberg and most of the other delegates, arrived in the form of the convention’s second agreement: driving forward “strategic Hityashvut,” with the declaration that “settlement on the borders of Israel is the most important task of Jewish Youth.” This was considered especially true for far-right Jewish youth, because it would, in part, justify Betar’s demand for territorial expansion—otherwise a difficult argument to make “so long as youth of different [Zionist] movements were concentrated on the exposed border positions.”¹⁸⁶

This motion did not achieve full consensus. Yirmiyahu Halperin, a Betar leader who had led the 1929 march to the Western Wall and who had been a senior aide to Jabotinsky during Revisionism’s early years, expressed an almost spiritual disagreement with the focus on settlement: Betar’s emphasis, he argued, had always been on “adventure” and its “continuous search for new horizons.” Yet the response from his peers, which sought to highlight Betar’s distinction from their Zionist youth group rivals, was that while settlement was, for others, “an end itself, the Betar look[s] upon it as a weapon to bring about Shleimut HaAretz.”¹⁸⁷ And with that, the main purpose of the convention—to “[reaffirm] the ideological aim of the Betar,” and to stress that Jewish communities in both Israel and the diaspora “would continue to be in mortal danger” until all of Greater Israel had been conquered—was achieved. The hope, for the

¹⁸⁵ Rosenberg, “Kinus Olami,” 3-4.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

delegates, was that “strategic Hityashvut” would spearhead Betar’s push to remain at “the forefront of the fight for Jewish Freedom.”¹⁸⁸

As the new decade arrived, then, Betar USA continued to push for rapid emigration while supporting the upbuilding of Revisionist settlements in Israel. Those who did leave for the Middle East were much fêted after their departure, with attendees of the October 1950 Revisionist conference in the U.S. hearing, for the first time, about “the... American Betarim in Israel” who were cast—even if implicitly—in a more worthy role than the European Jews whom Begin had prioritized for immigration and absorption, as well as those Jews who had come from non-Western countries. “The American Betari in Israel is not a refugee,” a Betar emissary from Israel told the conference delegates. “[H]e came not of necessity but of choice and imbued with the pioneering spirit and the spirit of American democracy.”¹⁸⁹ In the wake of the conference, the organization once again attempted to step up its emigration drive, issuing a notice the following month—styled after a military order—that gave members a deadline for moving to Israel. “Since Betar carries the banner of maximum Zionism, one of whose aims is the return to Zion and the liquidation of the exiles,” the order declared, “it makes Aliyah compulsory for its members.” Any Betar member over the age of 21 who had been in the organization for at least two years was, per this notice, obligated to emigrate to Israel, unless they were carrying out work on behalf of Betar in the diaspora—in which case their move could be postponed.¹⁹⁰ This imperative, and the centrality of the American-Jewish far right to Israel’s upbuilding, were reaffirmed at the 1951

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹⁸⁹ “The Friends of Mevo’ot Betar,” *Our Way: Informational Bulletin of the Friends of Mevo’ot Betar*, January 1951, 10. Jabotinsky Institute Archives, Gimel 16 - 21.

¹⁹⁰ A. Drori and M. Gold, “Tsav Betar #1 (Tsav Aliyah),” November 1, 1950, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 1/2.

Betar international conference, where delegates heard that American Betarim had to “supply the manpower” for the movement’s settlements, and that they would be “the future resevoir [sic] of the New Generation of Betar.”¹⁹¹

Despite the push for “*aliyah*,” however, there were those within the American-Jewish far right who identified compelling reasons to remain within the U.S., or at least to resist the idea of total emigration. Concerns over the viability and sustainability of the “*aliyah*” program arose, as did fears that it was premature to assume that Israel did not need American Jews advocating on its behalf in the U.S. In a Betar national council meeting in spring 1950, for example, one speaker insisted that work in the U.S. was “more important that [sic] in Israel,” while repeating the idea that American Jews somehow represented better “stock” than the majority of Jews who had made their way to Israel. Being “healthy mentally and physically,” American Jews—unlike “Jews in Israel [who] come from countries where democracy does not exist”—were responsible for “bring[ing] democracy to Israel,” the speaker argued, warning that “Israel is a dictatorship which is good only in time of war.”¹⁹² Later that year, a Betar newsletter, acknowledging that many of the American Betarim who immigrated to Israel failed to properly settle in, with some of them returning to the U.S. not long after having left, suggested that the emigration program was “premature.”¹⁹³ And, in another nod to the broader issues facing Zionist activists in the

¹⁹¹ “Special - Kinus Olami Report,” *Tel Hai!* 5, no. 2, December 6, 1951, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - 21.

¹⁹² Betar USA, National Council meeting minutes, April 15, 1950, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 1/2. The speaker is only listed by the last name “Bard”; he was likely Seldon Bard, a New York Betar activist who had joined the movement in 1940. Bard was killed in the 1974 bombing by a Palestinian militant group of a TWA flight from Israel to New York.

¹⁹³ Netzivut Betar, “Update on Betar Settlements in Israel,” *Yediot Betar: Betar Newsletter*, November 24, 1950, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 8/17.

postwar and post-statehood period, Betar USA leaders in particular frequently expressed concern about American Jews' slipping engagement with Zionism—a trend that made the prospect of building any momentum on the far right near-impossible, with or without the backing of their Israeli counterparts.

The early 1950s did, however, bring a shift in the Israeli far right's attitude toward their American-Jewish peers. Begin, following his party's lackluster showing in the first Israeli elections and facing a daunting task in trying to prize Labor's grip from the levers of power, came around to the necessity of diaspora activism, particularly in the U.S. David Bukspan, a Revisionist leader born in the then-Austro-Hungarian Empire who had been dispatched to the U.S. from Palestine on behalf of the New Zionist Organization during and immediately after World War II, and who had been interned in British detention camps, was once again sent across the Atlantic in order to boost the U.S. movement—this time, as a member of the Herut party apparatus, and a representative of the global Revisionist movement and of the United Zionist-Revisionists of America (UZRA).¹⁹⁴ Arriving in October 1951, Bukspan was tasked with reinvigorating a stuttering movement that was bereft of funds, leaders, and—in contrast to the urgencies of the fight for statehood—an animating mission. His assignment came about, as he later recounted in a frank letter to the Los Angeles-based Revisionist activist Artsiah Hershberg, as a result of Begin “and the rest of the leadership in Israel” seeking to undo their undervaluation of work in the diaspora, and coming to the understanding that it was “essential to have a functioning world movement, since without that there can be neither money nor political backing

¹⁹⁴ “N.Z.O. Delegation Arrives Here to Consult With American Revisionists on World Congress,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, May 10, 1946; “Defense Regulations Announced in Palestine,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, August 29, 1939; “Dr. David Bukspan Returns,” *Herut*, March 23, 1951.

nor political influence.”¹⁹⁵ Begin and other senior Revisionists identified North America as the priority for this revitalization, and the Herut leader traveled to the U.S. in 1952 and 1953 in hopes of both growing the movement and, more broadly, “promot[ing] the idea of a world Jewish federation.”¹⁹⁶ Such an institution would, Begin believed, be the only way to ensure that pressing and thorny issues in Israel—such as the Revisionists’ key battle during those years, the German reparations agreement—could reach a satisfactory resolution, by canvassing Jewish communities worldwide. Yet Begin’s vision ran aground on the reality that, as Bukspan admitted, that the matter of negotiating with Germany did not have “1/1000 of the effectiveness of the Irgun fight” for consciousness-raising among their constituency.¹⁹⁷ (This was not for lack of emotive language: appealing, as did much far-right messaging in those years, to American Jews’ lingering anxieties and feelings of guilt in a post-Holocaust world, a typical missive on the German reparations affair from Betar USA spoke of “direct negotiations with the Nazis,” while warning that “the furnaces of Dachau and Bergen-Belsen are not yet cold” and that “lamp shades made of Jewish skin still adorn German homes.” In the same letter, the group slammed major establishment organizations such as the B’nai Brith, the Joint Distribution Committee, the Zionist Organization of America, and the Jewish Agency for participating in the reparations decision.)¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ David Bukspan, Letter to Artsiah Hershberg, July 28, 1952, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - Bet/1.

¹⁹⁶ Shilon, *Menachem Begin*, 177.

¹⁹⁷ David Bukspan, Letter to I. Kohn, April 2, 1952, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - Bet/1.

¹⁹⁸ Betar USA, “Betrayal!” Flier distributed at anti-German reparations protest, January 20, 1952, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 8/1.

Indeed, with “*aliyah*” stalling, membership stagnating, and funds remaining at rock bottom, far-right American-Jewish activists used an array of messaging—often centering Herut’s core campaign issues—to try and prod their would-be base into re-engagement with the movement during this period, to little effect. Alongside the German reparations issue, the matter of territory and partition was at the heart of the American-Jewish far right’s awareness-raising efforts during this period. Readers of *Tel Hai!*, Betar’s in-house newsletter, were told in early 1950 that Ben-Gurion, in approving partition, had “accepted the rape of Palestine,” and called for “[a]nother David, the David who established Israel’s rule...on both sides of the Jordan” to “arise and rule.”¹⁹⁹ In the same edition of the newsletter, the editors referenced Ben-Gurion’s “rape of Israel.”²⁰⁰ Not long after, a counterfactual Betar booklet struck a similar note, this time seeking to speak to a general American audience as well as the Revisionist base by comparing land ownership in the U.S. with that in Israel. The publication imagines a United States partitioned at the Mississippi River, where (non-Indigenous) Americans must suffer the indignity of being told the land does not belong to them, as well as “all the humiliation, the torture and shame of seeing their land dismembered, hacked to pieces, the frontiers mutilated.” The booklet asks Americans to imagine their “treasures locked in the womb of the earth...in the hands of strangers and enemies”; toward the end, referring once more to Israel, the text describes the country as “blessed with a fertile soil...Must this good land forever wait for the plow and eager hands of the husbandmen?”²⁰¹ Jerusalem, a consistent and key election campaign issue for Herut in Israel,

¹⁹⁹ “Israel and Elsewhere,” *Tel Hai!* January 12, 1950, 4, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - 8/6. Meir Kahane was the assistant editor of *Tel Hai!* during this period.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁰¹ Brith Trumpeldor of America, “Captive America and Captive Israel,” likely early 1950s, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 8/3.

was also the subject of such jealousies among the American movement, and the issue of control over the city was presented under the shadow of the Holocaust: a 1953 Betar pamphlet blared that “for the first time since its destruction, the City of David [referring, here, to the Holy Basin surrounding and including Jerusalem’s Old City] is *Judenrein*—the only city in the world in which Jews are forbidden to live!”²⁰²

A further Herut campaign issue—bringing private investment to Israel and dismantling the ostensibly socialist economic system that was key to Mapai’s institutional monopoly—also factored into the American-Jewish far-right’s mobilization efforts, and into its insistence that the diaspora had a central role to play in both stabilizing Israel and bringing Begin into power.²⁰³ In this arena, the far right was at least able to connect on an issue that was forefront in American Jews’ minds: like other Americans, many Jews were, post-World War II, mostly gravitating toward an ideological embrace of capitalism, in keeping with their broader assimilation into the American middle class.²⁰⁴ The lack of a similar economic program in Israel was, UZRA National Executive member Jacob Rubin said in a letter to members, “the most dreaded disease afflicting” the country, and one which had been the subject of an early-1950s “propaganda and enlightenment campaign” in the U.S. by Begin and other Revisionist leaders.²⁰⁵ Begin, while

²⁰² Brith Trumpeldor USA, “A Program for Zionism,” 1953, 5, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 8/2.

²⁰³ Numerous scholars have disputed the idea that Israel was, at its inception, driven by a fully socialist political economy. Rather, socialism was always secondary to Jewish nationalism and nation-building, and the government largely followed market principles during the state’s first decades. See, for example, Michael Shalev, “Have globalization and liberalization ‘normalized’ Israel’s political economy?” *Israel Affairs* 5, no. 2-3 (April 2007); Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Arie Krampf, *The Israeli Path to Neoliberalism: The State, Continuity, and Change* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018).

²⁰⁴ Berman, *American Jewish Philanthropic Complex*, 53.

²⁰⁵ Jacob Rubin, Letter to UZRA members, August 13, 1952. Jabotinsky Institute Archives, Gimel 16 - Bet/1.

campaigning in New York for diaspora Jews to be formally involved in the German reparations matter, also called for free enterprise and “a complete separation between power of the ruler and the power of the employer”; such an arrangement, he stressed, was a matter of “civil liberties and human dignity.”²⁰⁶

Yet outside the inner circle of devoted Revisionists in the U.S., such interventions did little to reverse the dwindling engagement among the American-Jewish far right, itself a reflection of what Bukspan called the “decline” of Zionism in the country.²⁰⁷ This, combined with his conviction that Ben-Gurion had “earmarked [the Revisionists] for destruction, since we are the only serious opposition group,” led Bukspan to urge support for Herut “from the four corners of the earth,” even as he acknowledged that the funds and enthusiasm simply were not there.²⁰⁸ And in the America of the early 1950s, there were other matters—both foreign and domestic—that, for the time being, posed far more immediate concerns to American Jews than did the affairs of the new homeland. The Cold War was heating up, and American-Jewish institutions—right and center alike—were preoccupied with making sure that the American government, and Americans, knew whose side they were on.

The Americans

The Revisionists may have been struggling to attract support amid a broader drop-off in Zionist activism and engagement, but that is not to say American Jews were not mobilizing as a

²⁰⁶ “Beigin Urges World-wide Jewish Plebiscite on German-Israel Talks,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, May 14, 1952.

²⁰⁷ David Bukspan, Letter to Moshe Lev, January 16, 1952, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - Bet/1.

²⁰⁸ Ibid; David Bukspan, Letter to I. Kohn, April 2, 1952, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - Bet/1.

community at all—nor that there was no accord to be found between the American-Jewish far right and their mainstream rivals on the issues of the day. As the Cold War escalated, and fresh concerns around perceived loyalty and belonging to the American project arose, American-Jewish groups from across the political spectrum found harmony in presenting a staunch and vocal anti-communist front. Typical of this trend was an affair that roiled the entire American-Jewish community: the 1950 arrest, and 1953 execution, of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg on charges of treason, and the imprisonment of Harry Gold and David Greenglass—all four of them American Jews—after they were involved in passing information about the U.S.’s nuclear Manhattan Project to the Soviet Union. Arriving early on in the Cold War, the episode was a preview of future anti-communist alignments in which there was little disagreement to be found between far-right groups and the mainstream American-Jewish establishment on the need to counter the supposed communist threat. This was driven both by the desire to line up behind U.S. imperatives, in keeping with the wider project of assimilating into Americanness, and the urge to dispel the antisemitic trope that presented Jews and communism as inherently linked.²⁰⁹

Although that particular canard predated the Cold War, it took on added implications for Jews in a United States that had turned its sights on the Soviet Union once the Nazi threat had receded. For these reasons, dissociating themselves from communism became a paramount concern of the institutional American-Jewish community—centrist and right-wing alike—in the post-war period, even if their reasons for doing so sometimes diverged.²¹⁰ Yet that alignment brought centrist American-Jewish outfits into uncomfortable company: even as those groups presaged

²⁰⁹ Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 130.

²¹⁰ Balint, *Running Commentary*, 63.

their anti-communism on liberal ideas about democracy and the rights of the individual, they ended up—whether inadvertently or not—singing from the same hymn sheet as those on the far right whose anti-communism went hand in hand with their racism and antisemitism.²¹¹ At times, the combination of ideological anti-communism and partisan politics conspired to create even more wretched outcomes for American Jews, such as with Republican efforts to undermine the post-Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals conducted in the U.S. between 1946 and 1949. Given they were conducted by a Democratic administration, the trials became a point of attack for the GOP, which labeled them as “unfair, as un-American, even as tainted by Communist bias.”²¹² Some individual Republicans went even further, intervening on behalf of specific defendants—as did the GOP Senator for North Dakota William Langer (whom, incidentally, Ben Zion Netanyahu had courted in the 1940s to support the Revisionist agenda), who lobbied to overturn the death sentence handed down to Martin Sandberger, a former Einsatzgruppen commander.²¹³ Partly due to Langer’s intervention, Sandberger, who had originally been sentenced in 1947, ended up being released in January 1953—six months before the Rosenbergs were put to death.²¹⁴ Part of this troubling portrait, too, was the work of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which targeted Jews as part of its spiraling anti-communist witch-hunts spearheaded by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the first half of the 1950s. Yet even as

²¹¹ Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 13. These alliances were not always accidental: in the early 1950s, the American Jewish Committee’s leadership decided to join the All American Conference to Combat Antisemitism, a “right-wing umbrella organization that included several anti-Semitic groups in its ranks.” Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion*, 140.

²¹² Ronald Smelser and Edward J. Davies II, *The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 55.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

blacklists filled with Jewish names proliferated, American-Jewish groups—including the American Jewish Committee—gave HUAC access to their files on alleged Jewish communists, and expelled suspected communists from their organizations.²¹⁵

Amid these crosscurrents, American-Jewish groups' strategic considerations won out; accordingly, their condemnation of the Rosenbergs—who themselves credited their Jewishness for guiding their actions—was swift and absolute. The American Jewish Committee maintained that the Rosenbergs should be executed.²¹⁶ The AJC-published *Commentary* magazine, which had a broadly liberal outlook, published a string of anti-communist and anti-Rosenberg articles, part of a developing editorial line that would eventually liken communism to Nazism—in form, if not in content.²¹⁷ (This stance would, as the Cold War wore on, be partly responsible for elevating *Commentary*'s stature and reputation on the U.S. political scene.)²¹⁸ When a communist group suggested that antisemitism might be at play in the Rosenberg affair, a gauntlet of mainstream American-Jewish groups—including the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the American Jewish Committee, and the American Jewish Congress—labeled the accusation “fraudulent,” and condemned the effort to “inject the false issue of anti-Semitism into the

²¹⁵ Tony Michels, “Is America ‘Different’?: A Critique of American Jewish Exceptionalism,” *American Jewish History* 96, no.3 (September 2010), 216; Diner, *Jews of the United States*, 279; Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), 54.

²¹⁶ Balint, *Running Commentary*, 64. This conviction was not limited to American-Jewish institutions—as Marc Dollinger points out, the trial featured “a Jewish judge, Jewish defendants, Jewish defense attorneys, a Jewish prosecutor, and Jewish witnesses,” rendering the affair a “celebrat[ion of] the social and political integration of postwar American Jews, just as it raised serious concerns about Communist influences in American Jewish life.” Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion*, 134.

²¹⁷ Balint, *Running Commentary*, 64-7; Mark Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 40.

²¹⁸ Balint, *Running Commentary*, 69.

Rosenberg case.”²¹⁹ And ADL chairman Henry Schultz, writing to President Eisenhower and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover in the wake of the Rosenbergs’ sentencing, proclaimed himself and his peers “shocked by the outrageous statements” of the Rosenbergs’ defense attorney that executing the pair amounted to “murder.”²²⁰

Revisionist leaders, for their part, were equally at pains to censure not only the Rosenbergs, but also those who sought their pardon—to the extent that it caused tensions with Israel’s religious leaders. Following a *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* report that twenty-two Israeli rabbis had signed an open letter to President Truman requesting clemency for the Rosenbergs, the stalwart American Revisionist leader Beinesh Epstein wanted to send a cable to Israel labeling the gesture “outrageous” and “harmful” to both Israel and American Jews, and proposing that Herut publicly distance itself from the letter.²²¹ Although Bukspan “refused” to send the cable, he nonetheless argued, in a letter to the Revisionist movement in Israel, that the U.S. Revisionists should condemn the rabbis’ “terrific mistake.”²²² Bukspan further slammed the idea that anyone has “the right to try to interfere with the decision of a court in a foreign

²¹⁹ “N.C.R.A.C. Denounces Injection of Anti-Semitism in Rosenberg Case,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, May 19, 1952.

²²⁰ Henry Schultz to Eisenhower, July 1, 1953, ADL Y1953–58:I:R, cited in Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters*, 192.

²²¹ David Bukspan, Letter to the Revisionist movement in Israel, November 20, 1952, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - Bet/1. Bukspan notes a disagreement between the *JTA* and *New York Times* reports as to whether Israel’s chief rabbis signed onto the letter. A report in *Herut* newspaper claims, they did not, but rather had each sent separate telegrams to Truman requesting clemency for the Rosenbergs. “Rabbis in Israel request pardon for Julius and Ethel Rosenberg,” *Herut*, November 19, 1952. A later *JTA* report notes that Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ben Zion Usiel in fact had signed the petition, but regretted doing so. “Rabbi Usiel Regrets Signing Rosenberg Plea; Herzog Refused to Sign,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, November 24, 1952.

²²² No such public condemnation appears to have been issued, although Rabbi Solomon Andhil Fineberg, an American Jewish Committee officer and staunch anti-communist, took to the *New York Times* to criticize the Israeli rabbis for pointing out the Rosenbergs’ Jewish identity, and accused them of “needlessly [ringing] one of the Communist bells.” Rabbi S. Andhil Fineberg, Letter to the *New York Times*, November 22, 1952.

country,” claiming, incorrectly, that the thousands of rabbis in the U.S. “didn’t see fit to take any steps.”²²³ (The matter differed from concurrent attempts to intervene on behalf of Iraqi Jews, Bukspan continued, “because they suffered as Jews, and because of their relationship to Israel.”)²²⁴

The Rosenberg affair, which spanned two years, demonstrated well the bind that the American-Jewish far right was in during this period. Their overarching goal was to arouse the pro-Israel and maximalist sentiments of American Jews to the extent that they would be prepared to up and leave their homes to start over in a new country, even as the community at the time was negotiating the crosswinds of assimilating into the American middle class while fearing accusations of dual loyalty (whether to the Soviet Union or Israel). Within that project, American Revisionists were committed—and expected—to drum up support for the Herut party line, when the party itself was focused on domestic affairs that had little bearing on the day-to-day lives of American Jews who were grappling with their place—and their reception—in a post-war America. And even though the anti-communist fight and the push for free market ideals provided connective tissue that both the American-Jewish and Israeli far right could agree on and rally around, the reality was that those fights had drastically different dynamics—and implications—in their respective countries. For American Jews, whether far-right or not, espousing capitalist and anti-communist ideals was part of a wider project of claiming the trappings and expectations of belonging as a minority within a dominant majority, and of intentionally disarming their identity as Jews during a period of heightened Cold War paranoia. For the Israeli far right, what

²²³ David Bukspan, Letter to the Revisionist movement in Israel, November 20, 1952, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - Bet/1.

²²⁴ Ibid.

was ostensibly the same ideological fight was actually a fundamental part of an intracommunal struggle over political power and what direction their new homeland would go in. Moreover, although the American-Jewish far right was at pains to stress their alignment with their Israeli counterparts, the fact was that the far right in Israel remained—despite gradually warming up to the idea that they needed American-Jewish support—wholly focused on pushing the Labor Zionists out of power. And on that front, things were going from bad to worse.

In search of a constituency

If Israel's first parliamentary elections had been a disaster for the far right, its second, in 1951, represented a near wipe-out. Herut lost almost half of its seats, while the Lehi party failed to pass the threshold. Begin's party was leapfrogged by the General Zionists, who favored a similar economic program; they tripled their tally from the 1949 election, some of which came at Herut's expense. That redistribution of voters would guide Begin's efforts to form a political merger later on, so as to expand his party's vote share; but for the meantime, the far right's isolation continued.

This right-wing power vacuum, combined with the ostensibly secular character of the state, led to small, grassroots far-right and anti-state groups bubbling up in Israel's early years. In particular, the political evaporation of Lehi after its lackluster electoral performance in 1949; the group's hounding by the state; and its lack of organization and deep divisions inspired a few short-lived splinter outfits in the late 1940s and early 1950s.²²⁵ Two of them, Brit Hakanaim (“Alliance of Zealots”) and Hamachane (“The Camp”), were primarily Haredi groups that sought

²²⁵ Ehud Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother: Violence and Extremism in Israeli Politics from Altalena to the Rabin Assassination* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1999), 61.

to overthrow the secular state which, they believed, should be replaced by a religious kingdom. They were inspired by the ideology of Israel Eldad (formerly Scheib), a former Lehi leader who continued the group's radical right-wing intellectual tradition when he founded the far-right *Sulam* journal in 1949, and who continued to argue—even after Israel's establishment—that the country's borders should be extended to the banks of the Nile and the Euphrates through military conquest.²²⁶ The two groups, although never numbering more than a couple of hundred members, and despite engaging in violence and vandalism against, for example, businesses and vehicles that operated on Shabbat, nonetheless received the approval of high-profile Jerusalem rabbis. By 1952, however, both groups were all but defunct, having attracted the attention of the Shin Bet for their violent anti-government activities.

The third group, known both as the Kingdom of Israel Underground and the Tzrifin Underground (the latter being the name of the prison where the group's members were jailed), also took their lead from Eldad's writings, but interpreted them in a more “traditionally” ultranationalist way than the other two groups—and, in so doing, drew in the more committed Lehi members of the defunct Brit Hakana'im group.²²⁷ This outfit was even smaller, rarely surpassing a couple of dozen members. But it engaged in even more severe political violence, with its members tossing a hand grenade at the Czech consulate in Tel Aviv, and setting off a bomb at the Soviet consulate in the same city—both in response to antisemitic show trials staged

²²⁶ Ibid. *Sulam* was published from 1949 to 1963, and counted Eldad, Uri Zvi Greenberg, Yehoshua Yevin, and Geulah Cohen among its contributors. For Ehud Sprinzak, the late scholar who was the foremost chronicler of Israel's far right, *Sulam*'s relatively short lifespan was indicative of the failure of the “radical right,” as he calls it, to get a foothold in Israel's early years. The magazine and its writers, Sprinzak writes, were “total[ly] isolat[ed] from public life” in the country, and after *Sulam* shuttered, he concludes, “the radical right became *passé*.” Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1991), 34.

²²⁷ Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother*, 66.

in the two countries. After two years of operations, however, the Shin Bet eventually rounded up most of the group's members, who were put on trial. The group was outlawed as a terrorist organization and, with that, the last of Israel's early grassroots far-right groups ceased to be.²²⁸

For all that these outfits rejected the path taken by the Irgun, however, choosing instead extra-parliamentary and anti-state activism over the more statist route taken by Begin's party, the grassroots groups did share at least one approach with Herut: focusing part of their attention on the fate of the Mizrahi—Middle Eastern and North African—Jews who were arriving in Israel en masse during its early years.²²⁹ Brit Hakanaim and Hamachane, in particular, took exception to the Israeli government's efforts to secularize the children of Mizrahi Jews by way of the education system. For these radical groups, the process represented nothing less than a “forced conversion,” and further evidence of the wickedness of the secular state.²³⁰ Begin, for his part, approached the fate of Jews immigrating from the surrounding region with the mind of a politician: he identified them as a potentially powerful voting bloc from the moment he formed his political party, and his characterization of Herut as a “people's party” in contrast to the “bourgeois” Mapai was, in part, an attempt to appeal to those Mizrahi immigrants.²³¹ Begin, like other Ashkenazi leaders, was making broad assumptions about the social class and level of education of Mizrahim; many of those arriving from Iraq, for example, had left a country where

²²⁸ Ibid., 68.

²²⁹ Although the term “Mizrahim” to refer to MENA Jews did not come into popular usage until decades later, I will be using it as a shorthand throughout the rest of this dissertation.

²³⁰ Ibid., 62.

²³¹ Shindler, *Rise of the Israeli Right*, 264; Shilon, *Menachem Begin*, 134.

they were—particularly in the capital, Baghdad—part of the social and political elite.²³²

Nevertheless, as the Herut leader toured the deprived, overlooked transit camps where the state had abandoned many Mizrahim upon their arrival in Israel, a warm reception made it seem as if his assessment and approach would pay off. In the end, however, Herut's continued wretched performance at the polls made it clear that Mizrahim had not, in fact, flocked into Begin's arms.

But the ideological and rhetorical associations the opposition leader had started working to create—that the right, with its ostensibly greater respect for religious traditions and Jewish history, and its enmity with a left that had spurned and scorned Mizrahim as an undifferentiated, backwards mass that threatened the Zionist project to create a Western-modeled country in the Middle East—would pay huge dividends in later decades.

In the meantime, however, the bigger picture of Israel's political map changed little with the next round of elections in 1955, for which Herut had set an explicit goal of capturing the vote of Moroccan Jews who had recently arrived in Israel. Begin had also failed in his efforts to align with the General Zionists prior to the election, and although Herut somewhat bounced back from its showing at the 1951 elections and became, for the first time, the largest opposition party, it succeeded only in reclaiming the seats lost from the 1949 vote. The party's vote share, meanwhile, had inched up just over a single percentage point from that in 1949. And although Mapai lost a handful of seats and a few percentage points in its share of the electorate, the party's hold over Israeli politics remained, apparently, unassailable. The outbreak in 1956 of the country's first major war since 1948 seemingly had little impact on this outlook. (Herut secretary Yaacov Liberman had, nonetheless, tried to arouse the feelings of American Jews around the war

²³² See, for example, Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

during a trip to New York, telling a pro-Israel rally that Israel's invasion of the Sinai was the country's Pearl Harbor; Revisionists would later complain that American Jewish had failed to "rally to Israel's moral defense.")²³³ Indeed, for a brief moment, the military campaign against Egypt, which Israel launched in concert with France and the U.K. after Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, had an air of the Labor Zionists beating the far right at their own game: the Israeli army captured a massive parcel of territory—the Sinai and Gaza—and Ben-Gurion, in response, adopted a prophetic tone, declaring the "Third Kingdom" of Israel at hand.²³⁴ This mood was short-lived: Israel, facing significant international pressure, withdrew from the captured territories immediately. But the message was clear: the far right, for all its focus on maximalism and divine territorial rights, did not have a monopoly on the drive to expand Israel's borders through military conquest.

The picture for the Israeli far right remained, essentially, much the same as the 1950s made way for the 1960s. Even as Herut consolidated its vote share in the 1959 elections, Begin's attempts to merge with the General Zionists had once more come to naught. So, too, had Herut's base-building efforts—including its continued messaging around Mapai's anti-Mizrahi policies, with Begin having pounced on the Wadi Salib rebellion that erupted a few months before the elections, in which a police shooting of a Moroccan Jew in Haifa led to fierce protests in Mizrahi

²³³ Transcript of speech delivered by Yaacov Liberman at the "Support Israel Rally" in New York, November 2, 1956, *Aliyah* 2, no. 10, November 18, 1956, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 8/21.

²³⁴ Shindler, *Rise of the Israeli Right*, 184-5; Shimon Peres and David Landau, *Ben-Gurion: A Political Life* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 2011), 171; Brith Trumpeldor of America, "Betar Newsletter," October 22, 1962, 8, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 3 - 10/4/3.

neighborhoods across the country, including demonstrations against Mapai.²³⁵ In the early elections called in 1961, Herut, again running alone, pulled in the same number of seats it had done previously. While far from moribund, the far right seemed to be in deep stasis—ticking along at the parliamentary level, but with precious little mobilization or grassroots activity taking place, and seemingly no catalyzing force that could reshape the movement’s fortunes. And in the U.S., the Jewish far right—lacking the galvanizing influence of an Israeli success story—was struggling to stay afloat.

Waiting in the wings

Starved of funds, personnel, and widespread enthusiasm, the American-Jewish far right spent the rest of the 1950s and the early 1960s in a holding pattern. Its internal debates over the finer points of how Herut might gain power continued, as did its attacks on the Zionist establishment for its apparent inhospitality to the Revisionists (the Zionist movement was, in the words of a typical editorial in one of the Revisionist organs, “much on a par with the most spectacular dictatorships of our time”). The movement kept up its annual gatherings, where delegates bemoaned their movement’s lackluster showing at home and abroad; and it puzzled over how to capture the political affiliations—and imaginations—of American Jews, and Americans more broadly.²³⁶ Various ideas were floated, from harnessing the support of American Christians, to drumming up Israel as a campaign issue ahead of presidential elections, to trying to recreate the

²³⁵ Herut, “Mapai Will Sow Trouble,” National Library of Israel, 4th Knesset Election Campaign Materials, 1959, accessed October 11, 2022, https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/Hebrew/collections/treasures/elections/elections_materials/Pages/elect_ephemera_1959.aspx; Sami Shalom Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel: White Jews, Black Jews*, tr. Oz Shelach (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 66.

²³⁶ “Editorial,” *Jewish World: Zionist-Revisionist Monthly* 3, no. 1 (September 1956), 5, National Library of Israel, Revisionism collection, S PB 3395.

pre-war aesthetics and ideology of Betar in the hope that doing so would revitalize the wider movement.²³⁷ None of it stuck, and the Revisionists further found themselves unable to capitalize on a wave of pro-Israel enthusiasm generated by the 1958 publication of Leon Uris' historical novel *Exodus*, and its 1960 movie adaptation. The book, which presented a romanticized and sympathetic telling of Israel's founding, re-energized American-Jewish engagement with Israel—it became, according to the eminent rabbi and academic Arthur Hertzberg, “the contemporary ‘bible’ of much of the American Jewish community”—while fostering admiration for the Jewish state among Americans more generally.²³⁸ (The book spent more than four months at the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list.)²³⁹ This was achieved, in part, by its portrayal of the “New Jew” fighting for his homeland as akin to the American pioneer, and the associated likening of the redemption of the land of Israel with the struggle for the American frontier—with the two sites paired in the popular American imagination as “crucible[s] of rebirth,” as the cultural historian Amy Kaplan put it.²⁴⁰ Uris's novel and its adaptation also, during a period in which Cold War tensions and anti-communist sentiment were stoking anxieties about manliness, compulsory heterosexuality, and the “traditional” family unit, served as an ode to Western

²³⁷ Beinesh Epstein, Letter to Abraham Chaikin, January 19, 1959, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - Bet/2; Brith Trumpeldor USA, “Campaign exposing Republican anti-Israel policy launched by Betar,” Press release, October 25, 1959, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Betar collection, Bet 3 - 10/4/3; Shlomo Brody, Statement delivered at Betar national conference, December 24, 1961, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Betar collection, Bet 16 - 6/2.

²³⁸ Arthur Hertzberg, “Afterword,” in Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 624, cited in Dov Waxman, *Trouble in the Tribe: The American Jewish Conflict Over Israel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 29; Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 336.

²³⁹ Balint, *Running Commentary*, 232, fn 35.

²⁴⁰ Amy Kaplan, *Our American Israel: The Story of an Entangled Alliance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 72.

Fig. 2.2: Brith Trumpeldor USA, Front cover of *Aliyah* magazine, vol. 2, no. 10, November 18, 1956, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Betar collection, Bet 16 - 8/21.

masculinity while “vigilantly polic[ing]” the sexual boundaries between Jews and Arabs.²⁴¹ Yet despite the presumed legibility of these themes within the Revisionist worldview, the movement seemed not to know how to make the most of this cultural moment. This was likely in part due to the book’s approach to the Irgun and the Lehi: “*Aliyah Bet*,” the clandestine interwar immigration campaign, is credited to the Palmach, and not to the “Maccabees,” the fictional Jewish underground that Uris used as a stand-in for the Irgun and Lehi; and the novel downplays what Revisionists perceived as the Haganah’s various betrayals of their far-right rivals.²⁴² There was, however, an even trickier dynamic for the Revisionists to navigate. *Exodus* was a tale of a completed historical process: the successful realization of the Zionist dream, as a result of which Jews could, in the closing words of Uris’ book, “celebrate...going forth in triumph from slavery into freedom,” even as they faced a new struggle in repelling Palestinians who attempted to reclaim the land and property that had been stolen from them.²⁴³ Even as this last line evoked the cover of that Betar USA magazine published a decade earlier, in truth the sentiment ran directly counter to a core Revisionist principle, in which Israel’s founding represented merely a stage in a longer fight to conquer all of “Greater Israel.” Indeed, the message of *Exodus* was of a piece with what Revisionists thought of as “[s]terilized” Zionism—a movement and institutional apparatus

²⁴¹ Ibid., 76-9.

²⁴² ‘Literary Critic,’ “‘Exodus’: Fiction and Truth,” *The Jewish World* 4, no.2 (January 1960), 11. YIVO Periodicals Collection, 000037174.

²⁴³ Leon Uris, *Exodus* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1958), 626.

which, believing its mandate to be fulfilled with Israel's establishment, had "degenerate[d]" into "a mere piece of administrative masonry [sic] and a part-time fund-raising machinery."²⁴⁴

The message that the Zionist project was by no means complete was not, however, compelling enough to mobilize much of the American-Jewish community, even its right-wing factions, in the early-to-mid 1960s. As in the immediate aftermath of Israel's establishment, a Betar conference in 1961 provided a revealing and comprehensive portrait of the movement's ongoing struggles, and the difficulty a legacy group such as Betar had—and would continue to have—in finding its place in the American-Jewish political ecosystem. In a statement to the delegates, Betar USA head Shlomo Brody acknowledged that the organization had only thirty-seven dues-paying members, and that the number of committed Betarim had scarcely risen above that since 1950. The "*aliyah*" program had essentially failed, he noted, with Betar sending only twenty-one members to Israel in the past seven years (he did not disclose how many of those had since returned Stateside); moreover, Brody added, the group was in a financial hole after Herut had decided to defund the Betar youth towns in Israel, forcing the American branch to send its scant funds to the global Betar movement to try and plug the gap. Herut had moreover gradually decreased funds to Betar over the years, following its belief that "Israeli politics is the most important thing for the Jabotinsky movement today."²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ B. Golany, "Statehood and Zionism: The Program of the Herut Revisionist Movement" (New York, NY: United Zionists-Revisionists of America, 1958), 30, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Hatzohar collection, Gimel 16 - Bet/4. B. Golany was a pseudonym of Joseph Schechtman, a veteran Revisionist activist who had been a New Zionist Organization of America leader during the war and would later become UZRA president. In the same publication, he called "[a]political Zionism...just as tasteless [sic] and unstimulating as de-nicotinized tobacco." Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Shlomo Brody, Speech at Kenes Artzi of North America 1961, "Kenes Artzi of North America Betar, 1961: Minutes and Resolutions," December 23, 1961, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Betar collection, Bet 16 - 6/2.



Fig: 2.2: Brith Trumpeldor USA, Front cover of *Aliyah* magazine, vol. 2, no. 10, November 18, 1956, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Betar collection, Bet 16 - 8/21.

Yet finances were not the only area in which the prioritization of Herut, despite the party “suffer[ing] reverse after reverse” since 1955, was undermining Betar’s present and future, Brody suggested. With Herut wholly dedicated to success within Israel’s political system, Betar had no choice, he said, but to “[i]deologically ... shift ... away from Herut, because Herut has ceased to be the protector of the Jabotinsky creed and has the appearance and actions of solely an opportunistic political party.”²⁴⁶ The American Betar was, in other words, being forced to go it alone, and although Brody took some steps to try and revitalize the group by returning it to its roots—reintroducing uniforms and rededicating the organization to Jabotinsky’s ideals—he did not have an answer to the wider movement’s transition into Herut’s orbit, nor to the ongoing contradictions of being a diasporic group that, according to its overarching vision, necessarily had to work toward its own obsolescence. Brody tried to position Betar USA as the vanguard of the Jewish far right in contrast to their Israeli peers, because they remained un beholden to the compromises of formal politics; but outside the group’s tiny cohort of true believers, and the remaining handfuls of other American Revisionists, there was simply no program for recapturing the attention their movement had won during and immediately after World War II. Moreover, the American-Jewish far right’s financial and ideological struggles were indicative not only of the wider transnational movement’s transitional woes as it continued to recalibrate around the newly-formed Jewish state, but also of the difficulty in maintaining such a transnational movement when its various locales presented such divergent political, social, economic, and aesthetic environments. Brody gestured at that disparity in his 1961 convention speech, but it was also visible elsewhere: in the continuous ups and downs in the relationship between Herut in Israel

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

and the worldwide Revisionist movement, particularly its American arm; in the persistent uncertainty among far-right leaders in both Israel and the American-Jewish community over what the role of the diaspora movement should be; and in statements such as that of Brody at Betar USA's 1963 convention, in which he argued that the "'demilitarization' of Betar... may have been good and necessary in Israel, but was bad for Golah [exile]."²⁴⁷ Language, too, was a barrier, with the American branch of Betar struggling to maintain relations with the global movement because of their lack of Hebrew skills.²⁴⁸

None of these problems were new: they had been present since Israel's founding, and the internal contradictions which fed them had been there in some form or another since the Zionist far right's inception. Yet the persistence of these challenges over decades of discussions, gatherings, and repeated efforts to "reboot" the movement in its transnational form made clear that either some drastic external force would have to transform the movement, or it would be extinguished, surviving only as a struggling Israeli political party with a handful of dedicated supporters in the diaspora.

Even though that cataclysm would indeed arrive in due course, the age of Betar—and the other pre-war, Jabotinsky-originated diaspora groups—was drawing to a close. The youth group would live on as precisely that, but would never again be able to present itself as a vibrant outfit spearheading the Revisionist movement, and as a force to be reckoned with within the wider Zionist movement. Nostalgia would keep its core leadership group plugging away throughout the rest of the twentieth century, scheduling reunions and sporadically introducing new initiatives—

²⁴⁷ Shlomo Brody, Speech at Kenes Artzi of North America Betar, 1963, "Kenes Artzi of North America Betar, 1963: Minutes and Resolutions," August 31, 1963, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16 - 6/2.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

whether rededicating themselves to Betar's training camps or announcing new student groups—but the dynamism and sense of urgency that characterized its early decades would not return. Yet even if Betar became effectively defunct in all but name, its net contribution to the movement was far from over: some of its alumni, as we will see, would go on to reshape the transnational Jewish far right.

The effective end of Betar and the travails of the wider global movement as it fell in behind Herut did not, however, spell the end of the transnational Jewish far right. Indeed, if the mid-1960s presented an ending at all, it was that of the transitional post-statehood phase. In the second half of the 1960s, two events—one relatively procedural in nature, and the other a geopolitical earthquake—acted as, respectively, a down payment on the political future of the far right, and a defibrillator for the movement's grassroots.

The first development was Begin's 1965 success in at last merging Herut with a former General Zionists faction, now known as the Liberal Party, that both immediately boosted his party's electoral returns and set the stage for a further union the following decade, which would create Likud. The new party, Gahal, commanded a fifth of the vote share at the 1965 elections. Although this was less than hoped for, and did not eat into the electoral numbers of Alignment, a new Labor Zionist faction formed out of a merger between Mapai and other socialist-Zionist parties, it represented a considerable leap in constituents for Begin.²⁴⁹ The caveat, at least for Begin's far-right faithful, was that the successful merger with the Liberal Party had been

²⁴⁹ Amir Goldstein, "Half-heartedly: Menachem Begin and the Establishment of the Likud Party," *Middle Eastern Studies* 53, no. 6 (2017).

facilitated in part by the Herut leader “ton[ing] down” some of his maximalist rhetoric.²⁵⁰ Yet even though the “Greater Israel” issue was not quite so central to the party’s platform, it did not disappear entirely, with the agreement between the two parties declaring that Herut “will continue to bear aloft... [t]he Jewish people’s right to Eretz Israel in its historical integrity.”²⁵¹

Even that minor compromise, however, became effectively moot two years later, when lingering tensions between Israel and Egypt spilled over into what became known as the Six-Day War. By the war’s end on June 10, 1967, Israel had tripled the size of the landmass it controlled, having captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, much of the Golan Heights from Syria, and the Sinai from Egypt. In the wake of that victory, as the next chapter will show, “Greater Israel” became a bipartisan cause, freeing Begin to once more loudly adopt a maximalist stance, and unleashing changes in Israeli society that—combined with Begin’s astute political engineering—would usher the country toward its first self-identified right-wing government the following decade. Yet even as the far right edged toward political power, that process would be overtaken by events on the ground. As we shall shortly see, the war and its aftermath had a transformative effect on the transnational Jewish far right, birthing new groups and leaders; injecting the movement with a sense of messianic certainty and zeal; and creating new avenues for diaspora support which, unlike in the past, made clear that the primary role of the movement outside Israel was to provide political, financial, and other material support from abroad. In the U.S., the newfound sense of pride and communal identity fostered by the war would be undergirded by sweeping political developments over the 1960s and ‘70s, and an

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ “Agreement for Establishment of a Herut-Liberal Bloc,” translated and reprinted in UZRA, “Newsletter,” May-June 1965, 17-20. AJHS, UZRA Collection 1933-1987, I-414, Box 1, Folder 6.

accompanying sense of crisis—and opportunity—that provided fertile soil for the revolutionary, and revelatory, messages issuing forth from far-right ideologues in both countries. A decade out from the Six-Day War, the transnational Jewish far right would, for the first time in its history, enjoy both grassroots momentum and genuine governmental and institutional power—a combination that, once unleashed, would not go quietly into the night.

Chapter 3: An Everlasting Dominion

Our bones are dried up
Our hope is destroyed,
We are lost!

[...]

Behold, I will open your graves
And cause you to come out of your graves
And I will bring you to the land of Israel.

- Ezekiel 37:11, 13-14, quoted in “Jewish Defense League: Principles and Philosophies,” 1973

In the mid-1970s, a far-right Jewish group that had sprung up in New York at the end of the previous decade issued a Wild West-style “wanted” flier directed at “the American-Jewish leadership,” charging them with murder. The document, authored by the Jewish Defense League, accused its proposed suspects of mass “silence” on numerous issues: in the face of the U.S. government facilitating an agreement that would see Israel partially withdraw from the Sinai, which it had occupied during the Six-Day War; in the face of increasing assimilation; in the face of “crime in Jewish neighborhoods;” and, historically, in the face of the Holocaust. Yet the flier called for more than just protests against the American and American-Jewish leadership: it also

urged regime change in Israel, seeking the ouster of the Labor Zionist government and its replacement with a territorially-maximalist ruling coalition.²⁵²

That flier, which brandished the JDL slogan “Not One Inch” (meaning that Israel should not give up a single inch of land), embodied many of the issues and challenges that would galvanize the Jewish far right in both the U.S. and Israel-Palestine in the wake of the Six-Day War: the specter of territorial concessions; rising fears of left-wing antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment as the American “New Left” sprung up in response to geopolitical shifts and crises, including the Israeli occupation; the desire to break the Labor-Zionist monopoly on power in Israel-Palestine; and ongoing existential anxiety surrounding not only the physical safety of both Israelis and American Jews, but also the perceived menace of intermarriage and assimilation. The document also hinted at a new phase in intracommunal fractiousness among American Jews, as they grappled with growing political and demographic divisions within and without the community. And, more subtly, it gestured at a continued paradoxical trend on the American-Jewish far right: strident appeals to ethnic particularism and prioritization of a foreign state to the exclusion of almost all else, that were nonetheless couched in an aesthetics and form that appealed to American history and iconography. And no one represented more that blend of styles and messages, nor took it to further extremes, than JDL founder Martin David Kahane, who as an adolescent—during the same period of his life in which he joined Betar, the Revisionist Zionist youth group—began going by his Hebrew name: Meir.

²⁵² Jewish Defense League, “Wanted for Murder: The American Jewish Leadership,” undated, likely 1974-5, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Jewish Defense League collection, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

WANTED FOR MURDER

The American Jewish Leadership

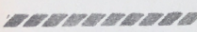


THE CRIME:

SILENCE in the face of Ford-Kissinger pressure on Israel to make insane, suicidal concessions; failure to lead the American Jew in loud, angry, militant protests; willingness to betray the Land of Israel.

PREVIOUS CRIMINAL RECORD:

- 1) SILENCE during the holocaust of six million Jews
- 2) SILENCE for decades on the Soviet Jewish issue
- 3) SILENCE on the problems of Jewish poor and crime in Jewish neighborhoods
- 4) SILENCE as young Jews jumped into "The Melting Pot" and assimilated to death.



**THESE MEN ARE ARMED
& SHOULD BE CONSIDERED DANGEROUS**

THROW THE MURDERERS OUT!



- 1) Protests against Washington Pressure on Israel
- 2) Protests against the silence of the American Jewish Establishment
- 3) Protests against the Rabin government's concessions on land, and demand a new government of national unity based on:

NOT ONE INCH!



Join: JDL/CAIR (Committee Against Israeli Retreat)
1133 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10010 • Suite 1026
(212) 675-8547 • (212) 255-0211

Fig. 3.1: Jewish Defense League, "Wanted for Murder: The American Jewish Leadership," undated, likely 1974-5, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Jewish Defense League collection, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

With Israel's capture of the West Bank, Gaza, the Sinai, and the Golan Heights during the 1967 Six-Day War came a new phase in American- and Israeli-Jewish identity. Israel's rapid victory and massively expanded territory—which included the biblical heartland of the West Bank, referred to in particular by the religious right as Judea and Samaria—gave Israelis an aura of invincibility and American Jews a renewed sense of pride and personal investment in a faraway land. Donations from the U.S. to Israel soared during that year, and the American-Jewish consensus around Zionism further solidified.²⁵³ And the nature of Israel's conquest engendered at once a surge in nationalistic and messianic fervor and further scattered the seeds of territorial maximalism amongst Jews in both countries, even as it also inspired principled opposition to the occupation.

The overnight rebalancing of power in the Middle East and the religious and territorial significance of Israel's redrawn map was the positive catalyst for the emergence of the religious far right as a political force in the country, not least in the form of its settler wing that rapidly set about installing communities in the occupied territories. Yet it was the pendulum swinging the other way, via the Yom Kippur War and the territorial compromises that followed, that led to the maturation and further radicalization of the movement—firstly by contributing to the election of the first-ever right-wing government in Israel's history, led by a party with roots in the Revisionist-Zionist apparatus, and then by the settlement movement's deepening sense of betrayal when “their” men gave up land in exchange for peace.

The Six-Day War had a different impact on the American-Jewish far right, coming as it did among local and national political upheavals—not least the Vietnam War and the associated

²⁵³ Balint, *Running Commentary*, 110. Balint declares, rather hastily, that in the wake of the 1967 war “American Jewish anti-Zionism, which had been deteriorating since 1948, was dead.” Ibid.

burgeoning New Left—to create a somewhat different calculus to that being developed in Israel. Here, American Jews’ increased level of comfort coupled with the rise of the Black Power movement and the New Left, along with the associated increasing criticism of Israel in reaction to the occupation, led far-right actors to warn of a double annihilation—one caused by assimilation that was being accelerated by a lack of antisemitism; and another, paradoxically, caused by the physical threat of resurgent antisemitism that, the far right argued, was increasingly appearing in the guise of anti-Zionism. The solution to both, in the eyes of the U.S. Jewish far right, was the liquidation of the American-Jewish community through mass immigration to Israel.

Leading the charge in the U.S. was Rabbi Meir Kahane, a militant showman grounded equally in Revisionism, religious Zionism, and a particularly American political style.²⁵⁴ That mélange, as well as his experiences in Betar, informed the ideology and organizational structure of the JDL, the far-right militant group Kahane founded in New York in 1968.²⁵⁵ But in the early 1970s, Kahane took his movement to Israel-Palestine—where his Israeli counterparts were laying the groundwork for a surging far-right trajectory that would, over the course of that decade and the following one, irrevocably change both Israeli society and American-Jewish communal politics.

²⁵⁴ The theologian Karen Armstrong suggests that the “mass rallies, unabashed sentiment, and showy charisma” so representative of U.S. politics has its roots in the Protestant fundamentalism of the nineteenth century. Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (London: Harper Perennial, 2000), 90.

²⁵⁵ Jewish Defense League, “Principles and Philosophies,” (New York, 1973), American Jewish Historical Society archives, JDL collection, I-374.

‘I ... need to deal with the issue of the gentile’

Born in Brooklyn’s Flatbush neighborhood in 1932, Kahane grew up steeped in Revisionist-Zionist ideology. His father, Rabbi Charles Kahane, immigrated to New York from Safed in 1926, and was active in Revisionist Zionist circles; the Kahane family hosted Vladimir Jabotinsky on his visit to New York in 1940, and Kahane joined Betar as an adolescent after being profoundly affected both by stories of his relatives in Palestine being murdered in the intercommunal violence that characterized the immediate pre-state era, and by the British Mandate authorities’ execution of Irgun member Dov Gruner in 1946.²⁵⁶ Kahane’s Betar unit was, he told an Israeli student newspaper in 1970, involved in packaging weapons to be sent to Mandate Palestine from New Jersey—many of which were eventually blown up when Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion ordered the destruction of the Irgun ship the *Altalena*.²⁵⁷

Kahane accumulated some responsibility as a member of Betar, heading up a local “cell” in Brooklyn by the age of 17 and participating in the organization’s national conference in 1951, where he was involved in discussions on and drafting of the group’s ideology and resolutions.²⁵⁸ Yet he left the organization that same year, at the age of 19, after failing to be promoted to the New York Commander role. From that point on, writes Israeli journalist Yair Kotler, Kahane became Betar’s “avowed enemy.”²⁵⁹ Yet there was more than just thwarted personal ambition at play: in his 1970 interview with the Israeli student outlet, Kahane acknowledged that he joined

²⁵⁶ “Am Yisrael Am Ehad” [“The People of Israel, One People”], *Bat Kol* 1970, 10, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ Betar Circular #1, July 27, 1949, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, Bet 16 - 1/1.

²⁵⁹ Yair Kotler, *Heil Kahane* (Bellmore, NY: Adama Books, 1986), 21.

the religious-Zionist youth movement Bnei Akiva in 1951 after realizing that the new Israeli state “was an extant fact.”²⁶⁰ This shifting of priorities mirrors the wider post-1948 identity crisis of Betar: bereft of the singular, if not sole, fight to establish a state, a new battlefield was needed. And for Kahane, reflecting back on his decision to join Bnei Akiva, the direction of that recalibration was clear—the new Jewish state did not, he recounted to his student interviewer in 1970, meet his “expectations.”²⁶¹ Instead, the primary aim was now to ensure that the state became a religious one—a task that, even as early as 1954, Kahane believed he would have a vital role in carrying out; in a letter he wrote to the Israeli chief rabbinate that year, he stressed that “Haredi Jews in general, and I in particular, need to deal with the issue of the gentile in the State of Israel,” before asking for “information regarding the matter of the gentile in relation to elections, authority ... according to the Torah, especially whether a gentile in the State of Israel has permission to vote and be appointed to the government.”²⁶²

Kahane cycled through numerous public-facing jobs and callings, as well as some more covert adventures, in the two decades between leaving Betar and founding the JDL. He took on various roles as rabbi, newspaper columnist, and editor, before becoming an FBI informant in 1963, which introduced him to the “shadowy world of spooks and cold warriors.”²⁶³ That sharp turn in Kahane’s career followed impromptu, ill-fated attempts to move to Israel in 1958 and 1962, which—lacking the fanfare he thought would greet his arrival—quickly turned into hasty

²⁶⁰ “Am Yisrael, Am Ehad,” 10.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane: His Life and Thought, Volume One: 1932-1975* (Jerusalem: Institute for Publication of the Writings of Rabbi Meir Kahane, 2008), 25.

²⁶³ Robert I. Friedman, *The False Prophet: Rabbi Meir Kahane—From FBI Informant to Knesset Member* (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1990), 57.

retreats back to New York, where he muttered darkly about the country's "warring political factions" and "squabbling Sephardim."²⁶⁴ As chaotic as this phase of Kahane's life was, however, it would turn out to be a prelude to his life's work: berating, provoking, and inciting Jews, and inveighing against those he perceived as enemies of the Jewish people and the Jewish state, initially under the auspices of the JDL and then of Kach, the political party he founded in Israel.

Kahane's founding of the JDL in 1968 brought together several local, national, and transnational sociopolitical trends that had taken shape over that decade—from the growing assertiveness of minority groups in the U.S. and the sometimes-intercommunal clashes that caused, to Israel's victory in the Six-Day War and its resultant impact on regional and international geopolitics. The immediate catalyst for the JDL's formation was Kahane's desire to have a Jewish "vigilante" group that would provide self-defense amid simmering racial tensions in New York, where a 1968 teachers' strike strained relations between the city's Black and Jewish communities.²⁶⁵ In short order, that mission evolved into a concerted campaign for the Soviet Union to allow its Jewish population to emigrate—an issue on which American-Jewish community became increasingly focused in the 1970s, and that the JDL took to extreme ends by orchestrating a series of bombings against Russian targets in the U.S., marking the group's formal transition into terrorist activity.²⁶⁶ Kahane's radicalism on this front earned him early

²⁶⁴ Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane, Vol. 1*, 40; Friedman, *False Prophet*, 53.

²⁶⁵ Lurking in the background of these tensions was also the growing solidarity between Palestinians and the Black Panther Party. Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 114.

²⁶⁶ Judith Tydor Baumel, "Kahane in America: An Exercise in Right-Wing Urban Terror," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 22, no. 4 (1999), 315.

right-wing plaudits in Israel (including future prime minister Menachem Begin),²⁶⁷ and his activities with the JDL gave him a foundation of name recognition in the country that he was able to build on after he moved there in 1971. Yet more than anything, the JDL provided Kahane with a platform from which he could blend, brand, and promote his various fixations on racial and religious purity, Jewish survival, masculine pride, and redemptive violence.

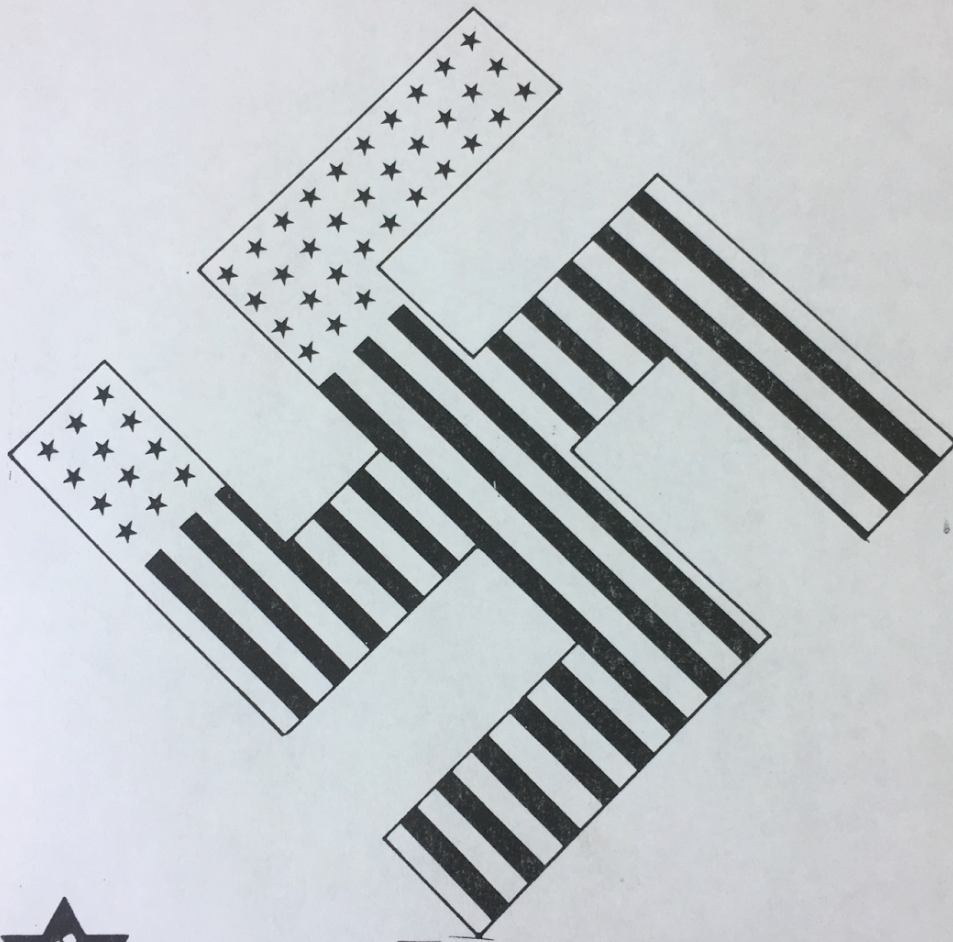
‘The original Jewish men’s group’

For all that the post-war American-Jewish story was largely one of a growing sense of security and increasing social and economic integration, Kahane’s political activism was driven by a fear of obliteration—of Jewish tradition, peoplehood, masculinity, and sovereignty—that seemed, on the face of it, out of step with the moment. Within a few years of the Six-Day War, Kahane began popularizing the expression “never again” as a means of emphasizing the perennial threat of Israeli and Jewish destruction, an eternally looming second Holocaust.²⁶⁸ For Kahane, who grew up shaped by the 1930s and ‘40s European-Jewish experience and by the battle to establish a Jewish state, the Holocaust was an amorphous, boundless disaster that transcended time and space: in his innumerable columns, books, speeches, and interviews, the rabbi pointed to the Holocaust not only as a historical episode, but also an endlessly postponed event horizon wherein Jews in the diaspora and Israel faced annihilation at the hands of neo-Nazis,

²⁶⁷ Friedman, *False Prophet*, 131.

²⁶⁸ Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 190. Kaplan claims Kahane coined the term “never again”; in reality, he likely simply popularized it. Milton Himmelfarb, writing in 1971, claims the expression surfaced among American Jews in the lead-up to the Six-Day War, fearing Israel faced existential peril. Himmelfarb, “Never Again,” *Commentary* 52, no. 2 (August 1, 1971), 73, <https://www.commentary.org/articles/milton-himmelfarb-2/never-again/>. Yet Kaplan suggests that the U.S. and Israeli press had largely expected Israel to win that war, and that “[t]he narrative that Israel had narrowly averted an apocalypse in June 1967 was largely a retrospective one.” Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 97.

**JEW S! GET READY
IT'S COMING!**



JOIN JDL NOW !

**JEWISH DEFENSE LEAGUE
76 Madison Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10016
(212) 686-3041**

Fig. 3.2: Jewish Defense League, "Jews! Get Ready it's Coming!" flier, undated, prob. 1970s, Jabotinsky Institute archives, JDL collection, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

communists, Arabs (especially Muslim Arabs), Black Power advocates, the left, Reform Jews, the Ashkenazi hegemony (in the case of Mizrahi Jews in Israel), and so on.²⁶⁹

As much as Kahane appointed himself a Cassandra-like figure regarding the threat of physical destruction from without, he also paradoxically portrayed the Holocaust as an ongoing phenomenon in which American Jewry was slowly self-destructing through assimilation. This was, Kahane emphasized, the result of increasing security enjoyed by American Jews in the post-war years—and above all post-Six-Day War—and decades of Jewish assimilation into American whiteness and, for the more economically fortunate, middle-class respectability.²⁷⁰ Railing against the “Holocaust” of assimilation, Kahane designated the “comfortable Jew” the sworn enemy of the Jewish people, embodying a naive, exilic, and even craven mentality that prioritized pleasing non-Jews over defending the Jewish community, and that “substituted for true Jewish values an American synthetic version thereof...consist[ing] mainly of Jewish food, lavish Bar Mitzves, and resort hotels in the Catskills and Miami Beach.”²⁷¹ He viewed abundant safety as fertile soil for a kind of auto-extirmination, a point he articulated vividly in his writings: in his 1972 book *Never Again! A Program for Survival*, Kahane asserted that “that in

²⁶⁹ Karen Armstrong emphasizes the disfigured nature of Kahane’s theology, one that folded every non-Jewish identity into a flattened, ubiquitous enemy. Armstrong, *Battle for God*, 350. Kahane and Kach’s discursive treatment of discrimination against Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews in Israel as a “spiritual Holocaust,” and the gendered contours of that crusade, is discussed in ch. 4.

²⁷⁰ See, for example, Karen Brodsky, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Jersey, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). Kahane’s assessment occludes the experiences of non-white Jews, as does the vast majority of the literature on the modern history of Jews in the U.S. See, for example, Bruce D. Haynes, *The Soul of Judaism: Jews of African Descent in America* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018); Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, *The Colors of Jews: Racial Politics and Radical Diasporism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007); Janice W. Fernheimer, *Stepping Into Zion: Hatzad Harishon, Black Jews, and the Remaking of Jewish Identity* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2014).

²⁷¹ Jewish Defense League, “Principles and Philosophies,” 10.

which Auschwitz failed is being accomplished by the sweet smell of assimilation,”²⁷² while in a 1976 column for the *Jewish Press*, “Goyim, Chulent, and Torah,” he argued that a decrease in severe antisemitism was driving Jews to assimilate and intermarry in ever-greater numbers (hence the “goyim” in the title).²⁷³

Alongside the contradictory emphasis on a persistent existential threat being necessary to Jewish survival, the arguments Kahane made in that *Jewish Press* column also articulated two interrelated, gendered pillars of his thought and action: his contempt for the idea of mixed relationships, and his fears over the degeneration of Jewish men and masculinity. “On two legs does the modern Jew stand, on goyim and chulent [a traditional Ashkenazi Jewish stew],” he wrote, before arguing that “[the Jew] has no chulent to make him forgo the shiksa.” Kahane used this derogatory Yiddish term for a non-Jewish woman throughout his screeds on assimilation,²⁷⁴ and it embodied at once his hostility toward non-Jewish women in particular, his misogyny in general, and his abhorrence of miscegenation. (Even as an adolescent, Kahane’s hatred of women “was a dominant part of his personality,” according to one of his old Betar friends.)²⁷⁵ Yet despite his offensive references to gentile women, it was Jewish women whom Kahane primarily tasked with avoiding mixed relationships and, therefore, preventing assimilation. To his mind, drawing on rote nationalist ideology, the Jewish woman’s primary role was to perpetuate the nation as

²⁷² Meir Kahane, *Never Again! A Program for Survival* (New York, NY: Pyramid Books, 1972), 115.

²⁷³ Meir Kahane, “Goyim, Chulent, and Torah,” *Jewish Press*, April 9, 1976.

²⁷⁴ See also, for example, Meir Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League* (Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Company, 1975), 100.

²⁷⁵ This hostility did not prevent Kahane from embarking on an affair with Estelle Evans, an Italian-American woman over 10 years his junior. His deceptions throughout the relationship and his sudden ending of it drove Evans to suicide. Friedman, *False Prophet*, 71-2. The friend who remarked on Kahane’s misogyny was Irwin Fleminger, whom Kahane had actually recruited to Betar, according to Robert Friedman. Friedman, *False Prophet*, 41.

mother, wife, and home-maker (recall Jabotinsky's 1929 missive), with her core duties in this regard revolving around reproducing the national group while maintaining its boundaries by refraining from relationships with non-Jews.²⁷⁶ Per Kahane's logic, then, when the Jewish woman failed to perform her role—with preparing “chulent” here a stand-in for creating an authentic Jewish home—the men, whether partners or sons, would drift away from Judaism and toward non-Jewish women. In that sense, the rabbi was making clear that when efforts to prevent assimilation failed, Jewish women were chiefly to blame.

Beyond viewing miscegenation as an arbiter of Jewish women's communal value, Kahane also saw it as an indicator of communal weakness, and mixed relationships between Jewish men and non-Jewish women as a mortal threat to the project of restoring the Jewish male to his ancient, sovereign heritage—invoked by the biblical heroes who pop up throughout Kahane's writings, from Bar Kochba to Judah Maccabee.²⁷⁷ His angst over the fate of Jewish men haunts the manifestos of the JDL and Kahane's other early texts; although they do not mention masculinity directly, Kahane's repeated calls for strength, emulation of male biblical heroes, and military-style discipline, as well as his antipathy toward perceived weakness, expose his obsession with male gender roles. Like his ideological forebears, Kahane promoted the ideal of a hyper-masculine “new Jew,” closely related to the “muscle Jew”; this archetype would replace the feminized, “weak” diaspora Jew—who existed in a state of abjection, to use Sandrine

²⁷⁶ Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, “Introduction,” in *Woman-Nation-State*, eds. Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 7. Jabotinsky, it will be recalled, made very similar comments in this regard (see chapter 1).

²⁷⁷ Jewish Defense League, “Principles and Philosophies,” 13.

Sanos' term, that intermarriage risked returning him to.²⁷⁸ The JDL—"the original Jewish men's group"—was, as much as anything else, Kahane's avenue for embarking on that mission to "save" the Jewish male—from himself, from non-Jewish women, from non-Jewish men, and, eventually, from the diaspora.²⁷⁹ And that task had implications that took the group beyond U.S. borders: for the American-Jewish feminist Aviva Cantor, who calls the group the "id of American Jewish men," at least part of the reason for the JDL going transnational was its relative failure to enact an American version of a Jewish masculinity readily on display in Israel.²⁸⁰

The apocalyptic pessimism behind Kahane's fixation on miscegenation, the "new Jew," and the need for an eternal enemy, also informed into his program for violence, which was itself intimately connected to his desire to save the (male) Jewish soul and the Jewish body politic.²⁸¹ For Kahane, violence was not only a means of resurrecting long-lost Jewish masculinity, but also a way to maintain the perpetual warfare demanded by the unceasing, amorphous threat of the non-Jew (and the wrong kind of Jew). It is perhaps on this front that Kahane's American career most clearly foreshadowed his fascism that would emerge more forcefully in Israel, where he

²⁷⁸ Sandrine Sanos, *The Aesthetics of Hate: Far-Right Intellectuals, Antisemitism, and Gender in 1930s France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 10. For the male far-right figures in Sanos' story, Jews were both a cause and emblem of said abjection.

²⁷⁹ Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 231.

²⁸⁰ Aviva Cantor, *Jewish Men, Jewish Women: The Legacy of Patriarchy in Jewish Life* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1995), 364.

²⁸¹ It should be noted that the idea that Jewish community is undermined when there are low levels of antisemitism is not the preserve of the far right: Simon Dubnow, for example, made the same point, suggesting that liberal tolerance in wider society posed a threat to Jewish cohesion, although without the exhortations to total war favored by Kahane. Jonathan Frankel, "Assimilation and the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Towards a New Historiography?" in Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein, eds., *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 5.

was able to propose a majoritarian political vision that could be applied to an entire society. His emphasis in JDL manifestos on militarism, youth, and violence as a means of national purification and regeneration echoed both Betarian language and, in turn, the calls-to-arms of fascist thinkers in 1920s and '30s Europe, who sought to inoculate against so-called modern “decadence” by inspiring the level of “heroism, sacrifice, and asceticism” necessary to achieve national greatness.²⁸² And violence was, despite his repeated coy insistence that it was a last resort, Kahane’s trademark mode of political expression.²⁸³ The rabbi subscribed to what Shaul Magid calls an “ethics of violence”: a program of ready aggression that prioritized Jewish survival at any cost, whether by attacking Black people and Russian targets in the U.S., or by assaulting Palestinians and breaking up mixed relationships in Israel.²⁸⁴

Like other fascists before him, Kahane’s glorification of ancient history in his doctrine for national and physical rejuvenation carried with it a rejection of the modernity he believed had driven his people away from their communal heritage. Here, as elsewhere, recent European history provided the impetus for Kahane’s pursuit of Jewish isolation and independence. In his 1973 JDL manifesto, he wrote that the Holocaust confirmed the need for Jews to turn away from the world and from modern liberal values, again invoking the figure of the “new Jew” who “arose from the mound of corpses at Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Buchenwald,” and whose alleged

²⁸² Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 71. See also, for example, Santos, *Aesthetics of Hate*; Sternhell, *Birth of Fascist Ideology*; Mosse, *Fascist Revolution*; Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991); Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*.

²⁸³ Kahane, *Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 142.

²⁸⁴ Shaul Magid, “Anti-Semitism as colonialism: Meir Kahane’s ‘Ethics of Violence,’” *Journal of Jewish Ethics* 1, no. 2 (2015), 202-232.

duty is to take revolutionary action in order to prevent further catastrophe.²⁸⁵ Yet even as he exalted the creation of the “new Jew,” Kahane attached this ideal type to the “ancient Jew”—the long-lost hero “who once walked his land so proudly and who loved his people so fiercely.”²⁸⁶ In this, Kahane’s vision modeled the kind of jumbled chronology typically espoused by European fascists in the 1930s—blending a disdain for the perceived decadence of the modern era and a reverence for a putative bygone age of national glory (in Kahane’s case, the biblical era) with an admiration for and reliance on the kind of social control and violent potential embodied by the modern state.

This cherry-picked mythology—and its usefulness in creating a fascist aesthetic—is driven home by the inclusion of a visceral, almost gothic extract from the Book of Ezekiel toward the end of the JDL’s political manifesto. The text describes how God places the prophet Ezekiel in a valley full of dry bones—suggestive of a people long dismantled—and then, before Ezekiel’s eyes, brings the relics back together and layers them with muscle and flesh. This resurrection, the vision goes, is to culminate in God’s promise to “bring you to the Land of Israel.”²⁸⁷ The process of destruction, despair, and redemption is prevalent in the books of the prophets, many of whom were writing in times of great upheaval and even danger for the Jewish people. But the placement of this ancient text in the context of a modern treatise on redemptive, imperative violence and ethnonationalism gives the words a different tenor. Indeed, the two texts act on each other: the excerpt from Jewish prophecy serves to lend the JDL’s program a messianic edge (while muscling in on the deference to the “prophetic tradition” invoked by Jews

²⁸⁵ Jewish Defense League, “Principles and Philosophies,” 4.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ Ezekiel 36:24, quoted in *ibid.*, 30-1.

active in the civil rights movement), while Kahane's fascistic political program gives the prophetic text a threatening demeanor.²⁸⁸ In this context, the prophecy is held to preordain the idea of the "new Jew" who is, in this passage, reconstructed from the inside out—starting with the bones, and ending with a reconstituted nation in its own land, now equipped with "planes and commandos."²⁸⁹ In Kahane's rendering, violence is the catalyst for spiritual and physical rebirth, banishing not only the "dry bones" of exile, but also the shame of the memories associated with them.²⁹⁰

It is in these seeds of fascist ideology that one also finds the roots of the new phase of multicultural, transnational Jewish far rightism that Kahane would eventually help turn into a hybrid political culture in Israel. Kahane's adoption of conservative American issues, and his ability to pipe them into a Jewish spiritual and political framework while drawing inspiration from his enemies and militaristic forebears alike, were crucial to his development of a kind of sedimentary fascism that was rooted in 1930s Europe and acquired layers of Jewish and American iconography and mythology as the twentieth century wore on. Like Betar, whose fascist trappings were both modeled on and a response to the various streams of European fascism, the JDL's ideology and praxis both emulated and decried an American sociopolitical environment that, in Kahane's eyes, offered greater freedoms and posed greater risks to Jews

²⁸⁸ Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion*, 14.

²⁸⁹ Jewish Defense League, "Principles and Philosophies," 12.

²⁹⁰ Kahane was explicit about this theme of rebirth (and a kind of death) in a 1971 interview with two Jewish college students. "I've always said that we're not out to form any new Jew," the rabbi claimed. "We're out to resurrect the old Jew that once was. And the new Jew is a product of the *galut*. He's insecure, full of complexes. We'd like to bury that new Jew and resurrect the old one." Zvi Lowenthal and Jonathan Braun, "An Interview with Meir Kahane," *The Flame* (Winter 1971). Cited in Michael E. Staub, ed., *The Jewish 1960s: An American Sourcebook* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 267.

than ever before—both of which he saw as existential threats. The JDL’s relative success in blending this mix of intellectual heritage and social contexts is worth considering against Robert O. Paxton’s note that the “derivative fascist movements” which mushroomed in 1930s America largely did not gain real traction, while those groups that “employ[ed] authentically American themes”—and here he cites the KKK and its adoption of violent antisemitism—gained a foothold.²⁹¹

On that front, Kahane’s calls for religious, social, and political conservatism reflected—if unintentionally—the influence of the American environment he was so desperate to reject.²⁹² He shared in the anti-communist fervor of the Cold War period, while also embodying, through the JDL, two novel modes of terrorism that emerged during the 1960s and ‘70s: that of minority groups seeking to draw attention to their plight, and that of ideological outfits seeking to change U.S. policy.²⁹³ Equally, Kahane and the JDL’s doom-saying regarding the despoliation of Jewish cultural and religious traditions, and their insistence that the Jewish community faced a spiritual, not just physical, war, was of a piece with the messaging of the nascent Christian far right that would begin to accrue political power in the 1970s. Although the broad framing of both groups was apparently opposed—the Christian far right sought to salvage its idea of “Western civilization,” while the JDL viewed “Western civilization” as the enemy of Judaism and particularly of the Jewish state—their religious fundamentalism, political radicalism, and social

²⁹¹ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 201. Paxton also comments that “[a]n authentically popular American fascism would be pious, antiblack, and, since September 11, 2001, anti-Islamic as well.” The JDL’s creed met all of those criteria.

²⁹² For their part, some of Kahane’s progressive enemies at the time archly commented that his militant anti-Blackness was evidence of his and the JDL’s “assimilati[on]...into traditional Amerikan racism.” “The Jewish Defense League,” *Brooklyn Bridge* 1, no. 4 (June 1972), 3. Cited in Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 238.

²⁹³ Baumel, “Kahane in America,” 312.

THERE IS NO PALESTINE.

Not one inch of retreat from the Jewish land of Israel!

Hell, No — We won't Go
from the liberated Lands of
Eretz Yisroel!

JOIN US IN WORKING FOR:

The principle of NOT ONE INCH OF
TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS;

The principle of IMMEDIATE REUNIFICATION
OF THE LIBERATED LANDS WITH THE STATE
OF ISRAEL;

The principle of IMMEDIATE UNRESTRICTED
JEWISH SETTLEMENTS IN ANY PART OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL.



JDL

76 Madison Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10016
(212) 686-3041



Fig. 3.3: Jewish Defense League, "There is No Palestine," flier, undated, prob. 1970s, American Jewish Historical Society archives, JDL collection, I-374.

conservatism were aligned. Both groups railed against the encroachment of what they saw as moral decadence, social decline, and spiritual decay, and placed Israel at the center of their foreign policy goals. And that ideological overlap did, indeed, foreshadow growing ties between the Jewish and Christian far right—bolstered by Zionism and shared appeals to a constructed “Judeo-Christian tradition”—that would take a giant leap forward as the 1970s gave way to the 1980s.²⁹⁴

It is perhaps in his call for revolutionary and self-defensive violence, however, that Kahane most knowingly co-opted American tropes, employing a hybrid aesthetics and form that drew on Jewish history and U.S. political culture. Thus, for example, did he claim the use of self-defensive violence as a “Jewish concept” while creating an avant-garde Second Amendment-style campaign slogan—“Every Jew a .22”—to try and fuel that policy.²⁹⁵ And he employed an Israeli-American historicization and veneration of the JDL’s violence, both placing his movement on a continuum with the Irgun and presenting it as an “outgrowth” of early American frontier vigilantism.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ On the political and cultural evolution of the term “Judeo-Christian” in the United States in the 1970s, see for example K. Healan Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America: Religion, Secularism, and the Redefinition of Democracy* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2019).

²⁹⁵ Jewish Defense League, “Principles and Philosophies,” 13; Kahane, *Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 134-5. According to a source quoted in a December 1970 FBI report, JDL members received firearms training from the National Rifle Association. Federal Bureau of Investigation memo, “MEIR D. KAHANE, also known as Martin King, Martin Kahane,” December 29, 1970, in FBI file 105-HQ-207795 Section 1. It should be noted that this was several years before the NRA morphed into its current, hyper-partisan iteration, although 1968 was the year that the Gun Control Act passed into U.S. law—triggering the increasing politicization of the gun rights lobby and the attendant reinterpretation of the Second Amendment. Robert J. Spitzer, *The Politics of Gun Control (Eighth Edition)* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 137.

²⁹⁶ Kahane, *Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 167; Baumel, “Kahane in America,” 318. Kahane was not alone in charitably comparing the JDL to the Irgun: in a 1969 column, Rabbi Irving J. Rosenbaum—a one-time ADL department head and executive director of the Chicago Board of Rabbis—criticized the bad press given to the JDL, whom he classed as “liberals rather than reactionaries,” and likened the ADL’s censure of the group to that issued in response to an Irgun propaganda drive in the 1940s. Irving J. Rosenbaum, “Is This A Way For Nice Jewish Boys To Behave?” *The Sentinel*, July 3, 1969.

Kahane's invocation of Israeli and American founding myths in justifying and contextualizing the JDL's violence was undoubtedly a means for the rabbi to portray himself as a world-historical figure. But it also had a subtler aspect that, while likely unintentional, pointed to the wider resonance Kahane's American-born ideology would have in Israel. By reaffirming the incomplete and valorizing stories Israelis and Americans told themselves about the birth of their respective countries, Kahane—like his predecessors on the Jewish far right—spoke to a shared tradition of exceptionalism that fed into a national project to erase or misrepresent the memory and evidence of the violence embedded in that founding—in particular, the violence directed at a native population facing an incoming settler society.²⁹⁷ Those constructed narratives, edited and embellished over time, by turns whitewashed violence or presented it as a violence of no choice; at the same time, they repackaged a trajectory of domination and oppression as a near-guiltless liberatory and even anti-colonial narrative.²⁹⁸ Central to this process in both countries was a teleological insistence on the inevitability and justness of that dominion—whether “Manifest Destiny” or the restoration of a divine promise to Abraham—that relegated colonial violence, if acknowledged at all, to a mere side effect of a righteous historical process.²⁹⁹ Kahane leveraged those origin stories and the entitlement they are liable incite when he appealed to Israeli and

²⁹⁷ Tony Michels discusses American exceptionalism, and what he argues is its misguided adoption by American Jews, in Michels, “Is America ‘Different’?” Yehouda Shenhav, meanwhile, critiques what he refers to as “Zionist exceptionalism” in Shenhav, “Modernity and the hybridization of nationalism and religion: Zionism and the Jews of the Middle East as a heuristic case,” *Theory and Society* 26, no. 1 (February 2007), 1-30.

²⁹⁸ Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 4.

²⁹⁹ Ella Shohat has written about the parallels between American and Israeli pioneering mythology, including their shared understanding of their respective territories as the “promised land,” and compares the Israeli “sabra” (or “New Jew”) to “the American Adam.” This American “New Man” was “a prelapsarian Adam...much as the sabra was conceived as the antithesis of the ‘Old World’ European Jew.” Ella Shohat, “Taboo Memories, Diasporic Visions: Columbus, Palestine, and Arab-Jews,” in *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 221.

American national myths, precisely as the two countries were being compelled to reckon with the active legacies of that heritage—in the U.S. via the civil rights movement, and in Israel-Palestine via its sociopolitical adjustment to being a military occupier. And by deploying those same myths to support his program of right-wing terror, Kahane exposed the potential for their legacies to mutate—via the alchemy of social unrest and political upheaval—into a politics of grievance that provided ready soil for fascism.³⁰⁰

As much as an analysis of the fascist dimensions of Kahane’s thought and action is relatively lacking in the literature on the man and his movement, such assessments did accompany his rising profile in the U.S. (and in Israel, as we shall see). There was, naturally, a continuation of the decades-long tradition whereby the Jewish far-left and far-right traded accusations of fascism and Nazism, and such charges regarding the JDL were frequently heard on the Jewish left. In a typical example, a spirited review of Kahane’s 1971 volume *Never Again!* by Hyman Lumer, a leading member of the Communist Party in the U.S., called the JDL “the most active spearhead of organized fascism in the United States.”³⁰¹ (Lumer also referred to the book as “Kahane’s ‘Mein Kampf,’” an epithet that Kahane’s publisher saw fit to reproduce in a later press release advertising another book of his.)³⁰² Yet such warnings about Kahane also appeared in the American-Jewish mainstream throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s: Harold Saperstein, a

³⁰⁰ For more on fascism and the politics of grievance, see e.g. Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*; Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (New York, NY: Random House, 2018).

³⁰¹ Hyman Lumer, “Kahane’s ‘Mein Kampf,’” *World Magazine*, January 15, 1972, M-10. YIVO archives, RG 1247 Box 10, folder 114. Lumer’s characterization, and that of his fellow communists, was likely in part driven by Kahane’s virulent anti-communism.

³⁰² Chilton Book Company, Press Release, February 1, 1974, YIVO archive, RG 1247 Box 10, folder 114.

leading Reform rabbi, compared a JDL Youth parade to the “Hitler Jugend,” while Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, the head of Reform Judaism in the U.S., compared the JDL both to the Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan.³⁰³ And even though many major American-Jewish groups refrained from formally applying such labels, they nonetheless vociferously denounced the JDL’s “terror” tactics.³⁰⁴

Despite those condemnations, however, the broader picture of the American-Jewish community at the time makes clear that Kahane’s ideology cannot be dismissed as entirely an aberration, nor his movement as having been shunted entirely to the margins. Kahane attracted financial backing from prominent Orthodox leaders during the JDL’s early years, and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations—the parent organization of Reform Judaism—warned in January 1971 analysis of an increasing tendency for synagogues, particularly in New York, to invite Kahane and other JDL representatives to speak. The UAHC’s position paper suggested that while this was no doubt in part due to “a program chairman’s dream for a full house,” it could also signal “a broader, tacit acceptance for the position the Jewish Defense League advocates”—a concern that seemed to be born out by a *Newsweek* poll later that year which put Kahane’s support among American Jews at twenty-five percent.³⁰⁵

Ideologically-speaking, meanwhile, Kahane’s evolving politics were the radical manifestation of a growing strain of political conservatism among American Jews during the

³⁰³ Bernard Weisenfeld, “New York Rabbis’ President Says JDL Reminded Him Of Nazi Youth,” *Philadelphia Jewish Times*, May 13, 1971; “Black Manifesto Read At Cincinnati Temple,” *The Jewish Post and Opinion*, May 23, 1969; Rosenbaum, “Is This A Way ... ?”

³⁰⁴ “Ncrac Denounces Jewish Defense League, Rejects ‘Paramilitary’ Operations,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, September 21, 1969.

³⁰⁵ Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 224, 230; United American Hebrew Congregations Commission on Interfaith Activities, “Jewish Defense League,” January 13, 1971, Jabotinsky Institute archives, JDL collection, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

1960s—itself in part a reaction to the ostensible hegemony of liberal views among American Jewry. This shift was embodied by the late 1960s metamorphosis of the once left-wing *Commentary* magazine into a “neoconservative flagship” that railed against the New Left, the Black Panthers, anti-Zionism, and anti-Americanism, and which recruited a slew of hawkish academics to its roster of contributors.³⁰⁶ Around the same time, a Jewish offshoot of the far-right John Birch Society, the Jewish Society of America, launched its own organ, *Ideas: A Contemporary Journal of Jewish Thought*, which “celebrated and fostered a more extreme rightward turn in American Jewish political life,” and whose first editorial called on Jewish conservatives to “break the shackles of fear which have bound much of the Jewish community to...doctrinaire liberal philosophy.”³⁰⁷ These publications, and the constituencies they represented, came down firmly on the side of the wider American right, not least in their staunch anti-communism and associated policy positions—supporting, for example, the Vietnam War, as did Kahane.³⁰⁸

Yet Kahane’s political program was not solely a product of the growing Jewish far right: it also reflected, in some of its foundational aspects, mainstream American-Jewish biases and anxieties that became increasingly pronounced during the 1960s and ‘70s. As we saw in the

³⁰⁶ Balint, *Running Commentary*, ix, 126.

³⁰⁷ The Jewish Society of America, “A Note to Our Readers,” *Ideas: A Journal of Conservative Thought* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1968), 2. The journal’s inaugural issue featured an article by longtime Kahane friend and fellow Betar member Joseph Churba, a professor and U.S. intelligence analyst whom Kahane biographer Robert Friedman credits with introducing the rabbi to the world of espionage and catalyzing his pre-JDL career as an FBI informant. Friedman, *False Prophet*, 56. Somewhat ironically, the FBI recruited both men to infiltrate the John Birch Society in the mid-1960s, just a few years before the Jewish Society of America was launched.

³⁰⁸ Such convictions were also partly rooted in the belief that a U.S. loss in Southeast Asia would be bad news for Israel. Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 151. Norman Podhoretz, the *Commentary* editor who stewarded the magazine’s lurch to the right, initially came out against the Vietnam War before later becoming convinced that it had been a necessary anti-communist intervention. Balint, *Running Commentary*, 157.

previous chapter, the vociferous anti-communism of the right was also the standard position of the wider community, keen as it was to adopt the principles of mainstream American “Cold War liberalism” and, in so doing, stave off potential antisemitism.³⁰⁹ Equally, Kahane’s emphasis on group self-respect, coming in a period of rising identity politics, embraced a paradox that reflected, and exaggerated, the self-perception of the American-Jewish community at large at that time, as well as that of Israel—what Amy Kaplan has termed the “invincible victim.”³¹⁰ On the one hand, Israel’s rapid victory in 1967 had imbued many American Jews with a newfound sense of confidence in their group identity, inhabiting the kind of “ethnic pride” that Kahane admired in the Black Power movement and wanted Jews to emulate, despite his perception of that movement as a mortal threat.³¹¹ That militant stream of the civil rights movement inspired a kind of “ethnic nationalist approach to American liberalism” among the wider American Jewish community, of which Kahane and the JDL can be seen as a radical—and distorted—offshoot.³¹²

³⁰⁹ Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion*, 130. According to Robert Friedman, Kahane and the JDL worked closely with the House Un-American Activities Committee. But so, too, did the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee, both of which provided the Committee with information on potential witnesses. The impact of their cooperation, wrote American journalist Victor Navasky, was to help launder the reputation and activities of HUAC. Friedman, *False Prophet*, 90; Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2003), 120.

³¹⁰ Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 3.

³¹¹ Lucy S. Dawidowicz, “American Public Opinion,” in *The American Jewish Yearbook* 69 (1968), 206. Shaul Magid, “Anti-Semitism as colonialism,” 235. The JDL even adopted the military-style berets favored by militant Black activists.

³¹² Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion*, 193. Kahane’s engagement with the left-wing protest groups of his time, and the shadow he cast over American-Jewish communal politics, is at the heart of Shaul Magid’s biography of the rabbi. While Magid proposes a kind of “horseshoe theory” in relation to the JDL, however—proposing that the tactics and ideologies of the far-right and far-left, in their distance from the center, were prone to meet somewhere in the middle—this framing mirrors, as Hadas Binyamini has argued, “the perspectives of Cold War liberals who decried extremism from the right and left.” It mimics, in other words, the stance of those same establishment centrists who often found themselves singing from the same hymn sheet as the far right. Shaul Magid, *Meir Kahane: The Public Life and Political Thought of an American Jewish Radical* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021); Hadas Binyamini, “Is Kahane more mainstream than American Jews will admit?” *+972 Magazine*, December 30, 2021, <https://www.972mag.com/kahane-american-jews-magid-review/>.

And indeed, in the aftermath of the 1967 war the JDL's message of "Jewish pride"—and righteous Jewish violence—had the capacity to resonate as never before.

At the same time, fears over assimilation and the future of Jewish identity translated into a cottage industry of projects—primarily driven by the consolidation of American-Jewish philanthropic capital—aimed at ensuring "Jewish continuity."³¹³ This expression, which was coined in the 1970s, concealed coded, gendered expectations about how that perpetuity might be actualized, and overwhelmingly placed the burden of "continuity" on women.³¹⁴ Kahane's ideas on the subject were typically far more vulgarly-expressed than those of his liberal peers, but the same undercurrents of misogyny and catastrophizing underscored the mainstream discussion on continuity: in the early 1960s, a senior American Jewish Committee staffer wondered whether intermarriage meant "extinction"; researchers Milton Himmelfarb and Marshall Sklare in 1975 deemed Jewish women "contraceptive virtuosos"; and, by the 1980s, the editorial board at the country's longest-running Jewish newspaper was calling declining birth rates "'a silent, less painful but not less pernicious holocaust' that had been 'sweeping Jewish ranks as though it were Hitler's legacy'"—a sentence that would not have looked out of place in a Kahane's screed.³¹⁵ On this front, as with the matter of anti-communism, American-Jewish leaders and institutions were

³¹³ Berman, *American Jewish Philanthropic Complex*, 116.

³¹⁴ Lila Corwin Berman, Kate Rosenblatt, and Ronit Y. Stahl characterize this phenomenon as a "paradigm...[consisting of] a set of expert pronouncements and community policies that treated women and their bodies as data points in service of a particular vision of Jewish communal survival." Berman, Rosenblatt, and Stahl, "Continuity Crisis: The History and Sexual Politics of an American Jewish Communal Project," *American Jewish History* 104, nos. 2-3 (April/July 2020), 168. See also Sarah Seltzer, "Birthright Israel and #MeToo," *Jewish Currents*, April 18, 2018, <https://jewishcurrents.org/birthright-israel-and-metoo/>.

³¹⁵ Berman, Rosenblatt, and Stahl, "Continuity Crisis," 176-8. The accusations directed at women about insufficient childbearing also played into misogynistic communal stereotypes about the supposed sexual "unresponsiveness" of American-Jewish women—a popular comedic line that on occasion fed into jokes about rape. Susan Weiden Schneider, "In a coma! I thought she was Jewish!" *Lilith* (Spring/Summer 1977), <https://www.lilith.org/articles/in-a-coma-i-thought-she-was-jewish/>.

taking their lead from the sociocultural impact of the Cold War: just as anxiety over “normal” versus “deviant” gender and sexuality swept through American society at large, intimately tied up with the moral panic over communism (hence, at the very start of the Cold War, the commencement of homophobic “lavender scare” purges at the State Department in parallel to those of communists), so too did Jewish groups “[take] their lead from this social science development in making their own assessments about “the Jewish family.”³¹⁶

In tandem with these communal concerns, American-Jewish groups were becoming alarmed at the growing backlash to the Israeli occupation, contributing to fears—particularly in the political center and on the right—of a so-called “new antisemitism.”³¹⁷ These worries came at a moment when American Jews, driven both by exuberance following the 1967 war and renewed fears of disaster following the 1973 Yom Kippur war, were increasingly rallying around the Israeli flag. Just as in 1948, the redistribution of regional power in the Middle East in 1967 further harmonized American Jewry’s stance on Zionism, even as that same shift pushed Zionism’s political credo further away from the range of possibilities its adherents believed it to offer at its inception—from national liberation and collective autonomy to cultural and religious traditionalist renewal—and instead drove it further down a narrow path of state power, territorial

³¹⁶ Berman, Rosenblatt, and Stahl, “Continuity Crisis,” 171. The rhetorical association between communism and queerness—intended to suggest shared moral and psychological degeneracy, social and political subversion, and a “shadowy . . . subculture,” echoed antisemitic twentieth-century linkages between communism and Jewishness. Judith Adkins, ““These People Are Frightened to Death”: Congressional Investigations and the Lavender Scare,” *Prologue Magazine* 48, no. 2 (Summer 2016), <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2016/summer/lavender.html>.

³¹⁷ The term “the new antisemitism” gained traction in the 1970s to include what was perceived as excessive criticism of Israel on the left, as well as anti-Zionism more broadly, especially when it strayed into repackaged age-old tropes about Jews, money, power, and influence. However, *Commentary* had invoked the term as early as 1949 in order to describe the increasingly blatant anti-Jewish sentiment pervading the Soviet bureaucracy. Balint, *Running Commentary*, 68.

expansion, and ethnocratic consolidation.³¹⁸ This in turn engendered fractious divisions among American Jews, leading to increasing mainstream anxiety around and intolerance of intracommunal criticism of Israel—a dynamic that deepened as the community felt ever more embattled over defending Israel’s actions as an occupying power in a period of global decolonization.³¹⁹ These geopolitical processes, and their domestic reverberations, began to erode the boundaries between the work of American-Jewish civil rights organizations and that of pro-Israel lobby groups—with, for example, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the ADL becoming increasingly aligned over preventing criticism of the Jewish state.³²⁰ To that end, and in light of a new sense of precarity following the Yom Kippur War, pro-Israel mobilization took on new heights in the mid-1970s. New right-wing pressure groups appeared, such as the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA), an ultra-hawkish, mostly-Republican-aligned think tank and lobbying outfit that would become greatly influential in later decades. And American-Jewish giving to Israel leapt in 1974 as the community reacted to Middle East tensions and doubts about ongoing U.S. support for the country; such fears, wrote *Commentary* contributor Nathan Glazer in 1975, were “slowly dissolving the [American] Jewish commitment to liberalism and the left.”³²¹ So pronounced was that shift, he added, that the

³¹⁸ Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 48. On the theory of ethnocracy in Israel-Palestine, see Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

³¹⁹ Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 125.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 158-9.

³²¹ Nathan Glazer, “Why Jews Are Usually Liberal Democrats,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 17, 1975.

attention paid to the JDL merely “obscure[d] the growing influence of other conservative forces among American Jews.”³²²

As the second half of the 1970s wore on, the growth of right-wing sentiment among American Jews, particularly on matters related to Israel, began to translate into a burgeoning pipeline of cash and individuals flowing from the U.S. to Israel-Palestine, in particular the West Bank. A steady stream of radical American Jews, many of whom were following in Kahane’s footsteps, picked up and moved to the occupied territories where they rapidly began rallying in support of a religious-Zionist settlement movement that was, as will shortly be discussed, already well-established by that time.³²³ Those who stayed behind began directing their philanthropic endeavors to some of the West Bank’s most radical settlements, including Kiryat Arba—which would eventually become Kahane’s home.³²⁴

By the time Israelis elected Menachem Begin as the country’s first-ever right-wing prime minister in 1977, then, he already had a larger base of American-Jewish support than he might have had previously. His victory prompted a further blurring of the lines between pro-Israel and anti-antisemitism advocacy in the U.S., driven by the increased difficulty of defending Israel with a right-wing government in power.³²⁵ Begin’s success also not only briefly revived—at least in spirit—the moribund and financially destitute Revisionist movement in the U.S., which

³²² Ibid.

³²³ “Twenty Militant Jews Arrested in Demonstration at Off-Limits Hebron Hospital,” *New York Times*, August 26, 1976.

³²⁴ Milton R. Benjamin and Milan J. Kubic, “The Bloc of the Faithful,” *Newsweek*, April 26, 1976.

³²⁵ Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 158-9.

renewed its calls for “a massive American Aliyah to Israel,”³²⁶ but also accelerated the emerging trends of neoconservatism, pro-Israel hawkishness, and existential fears surrounding assimilation and Israel’s national security—all of which had already coalesced in, and been radicalized by, the figure of Kahane.

But Kahane was, by then, long gone from the U.S.—and was busy continuing in Israel-Palestine what he had started in New York.

A ‘spiritual defense league’

Kahane’s early political program in the U.S. had a double-minority aspect to it: he was representing a minority ethnoreligious group, within which right-wing views—despite inroads throughout the 1960s—remained secondary to the tradition of American-Jewish liberalism. In Israel, meanwhile, where Kahane launched his political ambitions in the 1970s, the far right faced a different set of challenges: demographically in the majority, but politically frozen out. The 1960s, however, would prove the last full decade in which the left maintained its grip on the state.

The seeds for the far right’s political gains had been sown in the earliest days of Israel’s existence. But the country’s foundational trends of segregation, ethnic exclusion, and territorial maximalism were galvanized by the military’s rapid victory in the Six-Day War and its occupation of the West Bank, the Sinai, Gaza, and the Golan Heights. The nature of the conquest—prefaced as it had been by Israelis’ terror that the country faced annihilation at the hands of the neighboring states’ armies, even if their leadership did not share that assumption—led to an

³²⁶ United Zionists-Revisionists of America, “Policy Statement,” August 1977, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Hatzohar collection, Gimel 16 - Bet/4, Jabotinsky Institute Archives.

outpouring of messianic fervor across the country, and some unexpected coalitions in support of the Jewish state holding onto the territories it had occupied.³²⁷ Although religious Zionists would come to dominate the Israeli far right, the National Religious Party, or Mafdal—the religious Zionist party—initially opposed the occupation.³²⁸ At the same time, the Movement for Greater Israel, founded in July 1967, brought together advocates from across the political spectrum who called for Israel to keep the territories it had conquered and settle Jews in it en masse in new settlements.³²⁹ The Movement’s members included Labor and Revisionist Zionists, perhaps most starkly represented by the poets Natan Alterman, heavily associated with the socialist Mapai Party, and Uri Zvi Greenberg, who had founded the far-right Brit HaBirionim group decades earlier. Yet despite this apparent broad cross-section of support, the Movement floundered politically: running as the Land of Israel List in the 1969 national elections, the party gathered just over 0.5 percent of the vote and failed to cross the electoral threshold. And despite the apparently non-partisan makeup of the original movement, as a formal political entity the list’s place on the spectrum was clear: it was led by ex-Stern Gang leader Israel Eldad, who as party head advocated for the deportation of Palestinians from the occupied territories, and would become subsumed into Likud ahead of the 1973 elections.³³⁰

³²⁷ Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 97.

³²⁸ Moshe Hellinger, Isaac Hershkowitz, and Bernard Susser, *Religious Zionism and the Settlement Project: Ideology, Politics, and Civil Disobedience* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2018), 28.

³²⁹ Omer Einav, “The Watershed Moment: The Influence of the *Soldiers’ Talk* and the Movement for Greater Israel on Israeli Discourse,” in *Six Days, Fifty Years: The June 1967 War and its Aftermath*, eds. Gabi Siboni, Kobi Michael, and Anat Kurz (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2018), 174.

³³⁰ Don Peretz, “Israel’s 1969 Election Issues: The Visible and the Invisible,” *The Middle East Journal* 24, no. 1, Winter 1970, 33-4. Eldad’s son, Aryeh Eldad, would co-found the Kahanist Otzma LeYisrael (Strength for Israel) party, a forerunner to Otzma Yehudit, in 2012.

Indeed, despite the profound reverberations of the 1967 war, Israel's electoral map changed little in the short-term: Labor-Zionist parties continued to dominate at the polls, although their main rival—Menachem Begin's Gahal, which later became Likud—gradually increased their vote share in the 1969 and 1973 elections. It was into this calcified political environment that Kahane made his Israeli debut, emigrating in September 1971 and establishing a local branch of the JDL, simply called the JDL in Israel, which later that decade evolved into Kach.³³¹ Although he initially vowed not to go into electoral politics, insisting as late as summer 1972 that becoming a political party would “destroy [Kach],” Kahane broke his promise soon after.³³² Yet amid the socialist-Zionist stranglehold on the levers of power, Kahane's route to electoral success seemed—and was—a long way off.

It was perhaps that very deadlock that saw Herut initially court Kahane. Geulah Cohen, in particular, had high hopes for him, believing that he had shown up then-Prime Minister Golda Meir's diplomatic efforts to liberate Soviet Jewry, and that he could have a similar galvanizing effect on local politics. By the time Kahane arrived in Israel, Cohen had already established a “secret, semi-official support group” for the American rabbi.³³³ Begin, at that time Herut leader, offered Kahane a spot in his party list.³³⁴ The National Religious Party, too, was keen to bring

³³¹ *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, “Kahane to Form New Movement,” May 28, 1976.

³³² Avi Oren, “The Jewish Defense League in Israel,” *Israeli Independent Monthly* 14, no. 7-8, July-August 1972, 18.

³³³ Sprinzak, *Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right*, 49. On the other hand, then-Deputy Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir sat down with Kahane after the rabbi moved to Israel, as a way of screening him after Kahane declared his desire to meet Begin. Shamir advised Begin against a meeting, describing Kahane as “not well” and “unbalanced.” The contrast between how Shamir describes in his memoir the anti-Palestinian terrorism of the “harassed, angry, and mourning” Jewish Underground (whom he never refers to by name) and that of the “evil” Kahane, just a few pages apart, is striking. Yitzhak Shamir, *Summing Up: An Autobiography* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co., 1994), 151, 153-4.

³³⁴ Friedman, *False Prophet*, 131.

Kahane into their ranks. In the end, though, he rejected both parties' efforts to include him on their electoral lists, and alienated his early parliamentary cheerleaders when he set up his JDL branch in Jerusalem; Cohen, incensed, pointed out that Israel already had an army and thus didn't need the JDL.³³⁵ Eventually, despite his avowed aversion to electoral politics, Kahane announced in October 1972—shortly after being arrested on suspicion of smuggling arms, and with an eye on parliamentary immunity—the formation of a political party that would run in the 1973 elections as the League List.³³⁶

An early League List campaign flier introduced Israeli voters to the party's vision for Israeli society, drawing on Kahane's existing reputation and buttressing it with Israel-specific proposals. Taking the form of a Q&A—with the questions framed as “claims” from doubtful potential voters that the document is intended to disprove—the flier addressed the past, present, and future of the Jewish state, drawing on the same themes of rebellion, sacrifice, and redemption that characterized the American JDL's materials. Notably, however, the flier differentiated between the function of the JDL in the U.S. and that of its Israeli branch: the first “claim” it responded to addressed skepticism regarding the need for the JDL in Israel when there was now an Israeli army—perhaps nodding to Cohen's reaction to Kahane setting up shop on his own. The flier argued that the JDL's mission in Israel was not, in fact, to provide physical protection, but rather to act as a “spiritual defense league” in order to address the “spiritual crisis” befalling the country (reflecting fears that, as we have seen, preoccupied Kahane as early

³³⁵ Ibid., 132, 135.

³³⁶ Ibid., 150-1.

as the 1950s).³³⁷ In that vein, a League List campaign advertisement in an Israeli newspaper lamented that Israel's education system was turning the country's youth into "Hebrew-speaking gentiles" and "negating their Judaism."³³⁸ The advertisement also picked up the existential tone of earlier JDL missives, warning against intermarriage and calling for the deportation of Palestinians to neighboring countries—a policy proposal that would become Kahane and Kach's calling card. (Six months earlier, Kahane and an associate had been charged with sedition for mailing thousands of letters to Palestinian citizens of Israel, telling them to leave the country in exchange for compensation.)³³⁹ The advertisement even drew parallels with the sociopolitical dynamics that had helped launch Kahane's JDL in the U.S.: failure to execute a "transfer" plan for Palestinian citizens would, the advertisement warned, drag the country into "a situation like in Northern Ireland or a civil war as [with] the [N-word] and the whites in the US."³⁴⁰

Taken in tandem with the JDL's American materials, these early texts from the movement's Israeli branch began to articulate the two halves of the JDL's identity: on the one hand, a diasporic (or, in their reading, exilic) initiative that prioritized physical salvation through militaristic training and then evacuation; and on the other, a project that assumed physical

³³⁷ The League List, "Daf Hasbara" ["Explanation Sheet"], Jerusalem, 1973, Jabotinsky Institute archives, JDL collection, Kaf 24-10/4.

³³⁸ League List, "HaLiga LaHaganah Holechet LaKnesset!" ["The League List is Going to the Knesset!"], campaign advertisement, *Ma'ariv*, September 26, 1973, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Kaf 24 - 10/4. In a 1972 interview, Kahane expressed his fear that the lack of a traditional Jewish education in Israel would lead to the country becoming a "Levantine state." Oren, *Jewish Defense League*, 12. On this note, he voiced similar fears to early Israeli leaders, most notably David Ben-Gurion, who worried that failing to "elevate" the children of Jewish immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa would "lower the nation." Ben-Gurion was particularly concerned with the disparities in birth rates between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim. Gidi Weitz, "Newly Released Documents Show a Darker Side of Ben-Gurion," *Haaretz*, April 24, 2015, haaretz.com/premium-the-darker-side-of-ben-gurion-1.5354147.

³³⁹ Friedman, *False Prophet*, 153.

³⁴⁰ League List, "HaLiga LaHaganah."

sovereignty in a putative homeland and sought to leverage it as a means of achieving spiritual redemption. In time, especially as the JDL in Israel morphed into the political party Kach, the immediate tactic for this project was acquiring power in the Knesset—with Kahane himself taking the unradical step of trying to change the Israeli system from within, and in the process radicalizing sections of Israeli politics and society. These two halves of the project—physical redemption in the diaspora, and spiritual salvation in the homeland—speak to the hybridity of Kahane and the JDL’s political vision, in which the rabbi first set out to save diaspora Jews by urging them to become Israelis, and then set his sights on saving Israelis by urging them to become Jews. And on each side of this mission, the stakes for Kahane were never less than existential.

A crisis of faith

The political moment in which the League List staged its initial Knesset run seemed to have lent an aura of legitimacy to Kahane’s apocalyptic vernacular. Less than three months before the 1973 election, a surprise attack by the Syrian and Egyptian armies on the evening of Yom Kippur provoked a nearly three-week war that shook Israelis’ faith in their government and their military leaders, and profoundly damaged the national psyche.³⁴¹ The fact that the run-up to the war had been marked by a series of intelligence failures and the ease with which the opposing armies swept into the Sinai and the Golan Heights sent shockwaves through Israeli politics, undoing the air of confidence and divine favor that had flooded the country in the wake of the Six-Day War.

In the first half of the war, when Israeli victory was far from certain, however, the League List

³⁴¹ Ephraim Torgovnik, “A Movement for Change in a Stable System,” in *The Elections in Israel—1977*, ed. Asher Arian (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Academic Press, 1980), 76.

struck a more optimistic tone than usual, which contrasted with the general mood in the country. A campaign leaflet Kahane wrote on the tenth day of the war, headlined “Israel’s eternity and victory,” presented the conflict as an opportunity to even further expand into the Middle East, and characterized the fighting and a victorious outcome as necessary for Israel’s redemption, and thus preordained. “Within each war and victory of the people of Israel,” the flier declares, “is the sanctification of God until the final victory”—which, it stresses, is the pushing out of Israel’s borders to the Nile and the Euphrates. This glorious future—to be brought about through sacred, redemptive violence—is presented in contrast to a tormented past of “pogroms and inquisitions, Crusades and the Auschwitz camps.”³⁴² And the chapter on that past could only be closed through more wars, more sacrifices, and more victories: this, the document concluded, was the fate of the Jewish people, which was drawing ever closer as “the Holy One, blessed be he, is liquidating the exile.”³⁴³ This flier, then, was a conversation between the JDL’s past and future: a retreat from the diaspora, and total war—both physical and spiritual—in the homeland.³⁴⁴

Spiritual visions aside, Kahane’s dreams of victory would eventually come true in a political sense: the fallout from the Yom Kippur War dramatically changed the right’s fortunes in Israel, opening up a space for Kahane and his vision to resonate. The impact at the ballot box in Israel was delayed; Golda Meir won re-election at the head of the Alignment party in the December 1973 elections, which had been delayed due to the war. Instead, the immediate reaction to the Yom Kippur War was a groundswell of grassroots organizing that sought to both

³⁴² Meir Kahane, “Netzah Yisrael v’Nitzachono” [“Israel’s eternity and victory”], October 1973, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ For more on the centrality of total war to fascism, see, for example: Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017).

galvanize the inchoate settlement project and make potential territorial concessions in exchange for peace politically unviable. Foremost in this movement was the religious-Zionist activist group Gush Emunim (“Bloc of the Faithful”), founded in 1974 by a group of elite Ashkenazi men—most of them disciples of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, the cousin of Hillel Kook and head of the religious-Zionist nerve center, Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva, where many of Gush Emunim’s members had studied. The group’s founding members were among those who had been electrified by Kook’s words on the eve of Israeli Independence Day in 1967, just a few weeks before the Six-Day War broke out; lamenting the 1947 UN Partition Plan that Jewish leaders in Mandate Palestine had agreed to, Kook exclaimed: “Where is our Hebron—have we forgotten it?! And where is our Nablus, and our Jericho, where—will we forget them?!” The capture of West Bank the following month, and with it the cities whose loss Kook had decried, appeared to the rabbi’s students as a sign not only of his extraordinary prophetic powers, but also of the fact that the long-awaited, biblically-mandated “redemption” of the “Land of Israel” was nigh—and that the power to complete this task was in their hands.

Notably, however, Gush Emunim was founded not in the spirit of triumphalism and proactivity, but rather as a reactive measure during a time of national crisis and shifting political winds—in other words, reflecting the post-1973 war moment rather than the post-1967 war mood. The immediate catalyst for the group’s 1974 formation, which began with a meeting between Kook students Hanan Porat, Moshe Levinger, Haim Druckman, and Yoel Bin-Nun, was ensuring that the National Religious Party to which they belonged would not breach “ideological boundaries” in their government coalition negotiations with the Labor Party.³⁴⁵ (One of Gush

³⁴⁵ Pedahzur, *Triumph of Israel’s Radical Right*, 48. Levinger, who would go on to play a foundational role in the establishment of the radical Kiryat Arba settlement next to Hebron.

Emunim's most significant, if subtle, long-term impacts was to bring about the end of the National Religious Party as a "centrist and pragmatic" force, ensuring that the far-right religious-Zionist settler movement would never again lack formal political representation.)³⁴⁶ More broadly, however, the founders of Gush Emunim had—like the rest of the country—been shocked by the Yom Kippur War, and had specifically seen the narrowly-avoided catastrophe as evidence that they could no longer rely on the government to advance their political and religious goals. This conviction was borne out by the signing of a partial withdrawal agreement between Israel and Syria on May 31, 1974, as a result of which Israel retreated from Syrian territory beyond the 1967 ceasefire lines.

This drastic pendulum swing from the euphoria of believing a prophecy had been fulfilled to the disorientation of witnessing a rapid setback fueled much of the political turbulence driven by the religious right over the following decade. In particular, that minor 1974 withdrawal agreement foreshadowed far more significant territorial compromises—and thus losses for the settlement movement—that provoked ever-greater despair and, in response, ever greater backlash and radicalization, which would eventually lead to a string of Jewish terror attacks in the 1980s. Gush Emunim's transition from ostensibly nonviolent grassroots activism—that was nonetheless structurally violent and racist its end-goals—to repeated acts of "vigilante" and terrorist violence was, as Israeli political scientists Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perliger have noted, characteristic of oppositional groups that encounter repeated obstacles and reversals in attempting to implement their vision.³⁴⁷ For Motti Inbari, an Israeli professor of religion, the

³⁴⁶ Ibid, 51.

³⁴⁷ Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perliger, *Jewish Terrorism in Israel* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009), xi.

symbiotic relationship between what he calls “prophetic failure” and fervor represented the sharp end of Gush Emunim’s coping strategy when faced with political reversals—which they addressed either through cognitive dissonance, recalibration of the prophecy, or a redoubling of efforts.³⁴⁸ As will be discussed in the remaining chapters, this pattern held true not just for Gush Emunim but also Kach, as well as the wider right-wing religious-Zionist ecosystem.

Nonetheless, in Gush Emunim’s early years, the group’s internal messaging around political setbacks was made more straightforward by the fact that its ideological opponents were in power. Within its umbrella strategy of advancing the settlement project, Gush Emunim was able to rally around a concrete goal of installing a pro-settler government—even as it emphasized its own lack of party affiliation.³⁴⁹ Moreover, even as the catalyst for Gush Emunim’s sense of purpose was the mood of crisis that had pervaded the country since the Yom Kippur War, the lasting legacy of 1967—which mainstreamed, or at least made more acceptable, messianic thinking in Israeli society—was an advantage for a group that believed delivering secular Jews back to the religious fold was a key step en route to redemption.³⁵⁰ Indeed, that cultural shift precipitated by the Six-Day War foreshadowed the growing political power of Israel’s religious right, and the political and social capital accrued by Gush Emunim in particular announced the

³⁴⁸ Motti Inbari, *Messianic Religious Zionism Confronts Israeli Territorial Withdrawal* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5. There is a long history of seemingly contradictory responses to failures of Jewish messianic movements. For a valuable analysis of one of the more extreme examples of this phenomenon, see Gershom Scholem’s disquieting essay on the Sabbateans, “Redemption Through Sin,” in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, NY: Schocken, 1995).

³⁴⁹ Gush Emunim, Press conference statement, January 12, 1977, National Library of Israel, Gush Emunim collection, 1/1842.

³⁵⁰ Inbari, *Messianic Religious Zionism*, 17.

arrival of Jewish fundamentalism on the Israeli political scene.³⁵¹ This not only opened up a new sociopolitical front, which would in part help prepare the ground for Kach's later electoral success, but also—like Kahane—built on the legacy of the largely secular Revisionist Zionists while reframing their political project in explicitly religious, even messianic, terms—fusing Jabotinsky's creed with that of Rav Kook the Elder (see ch. 1).³⁵² And in turning Jewish fundamentalism, as well as the settler movement, into a political force to be reckoned with, Gush Emunim helped set the stage for Israel—like the U.S.—to descend into deeply divisive culture wars around the place of religion in society and politics, driven by an increasingly powerful religious right throughout the 1970s and, even more so, the 1980s.

The home front

First, though, Gush Emunim needed to sell its message to a weary Israeli public that was still reeling from the Yom Kippur War. Integral to this push for public sympathy was the portrayal of the newly-occupied territories as an indivisible part of the State of Israel, for security and spiritual reasons alike. Thus did an early Gush Emunim pamphlet, titled “We will fight for the settlement of Israel!” and published in 1974, insist that the settlement project was essential to safeguarding Israel's future. Sensitive to the aftermath of a near-catastrophe during the 1973 war, the document argued that withdrawing from the occupied territories would telegraph “weakness” on the part of Israel—which would, in turn, encourage further attacks and wars. The pamphlet further suggested that leaving the occupied territories would expose central Israeli towns such as

³⁵¹ Ian Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1988), 42-3.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 32.

Jerusalem and Tel Aviv to the kinds of enemy fire absorbed by Israeli communities along the Lebanese border; ultimately, it warned, “the choice is: terrorists in Samaria, or settlers in Samaria.”³⁵³ (This attempted axiom would take on added meaning in later years, when leading members of Gush Emunim perpetrated acts of terrorism in the occupied territories.)

In addition to emphasizing the need for a practical mission of settlement expansion, Gush Emunim’s pamphlet also urged increased Jewish immigration to Israel as well as efforts to boost the Jewish birth rate. On this front, the group was in lockstep with the Israeli political mainstream, where pro-aliyah and natalist policies had been *de rigueur* since the founding of the state (and where the emphasis on conscripting women’s bodies to the cause of Jewish “continuity,” broadly defined, matched that in the American-Jewish community). These political impulses—driven both by a desire to “repopulate” following the destruction of the Holocaust, and by “intense demographic anxiety” due to the presence of the Palestinians who remained in the country following the Nakba—only intensified following the Six-Day War, when the number of Palestinians in Israeli-controlled territories more than trebled almost overnight.³⁵⁴ Thus, for example, did former Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion accuse Jewish women in a December 1967 article of “defrauding the Jewish mission” if they failed to have at least four children.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ Gush Emunim, “Al Yishuv HaAretz Anu Ne’evakim!” [“We Are Fighting for the Settlement of Israel!”], 1974, National Library of Israel, Gush Emunim collection, 1842/2.

³⁵⁴ Rebecca Steinfeld, “War of the Wombs: Struggles Over Abortion Policies in Israel,” *Israel Studies* 20, no. 2 (Summer 2015), 2, 7.

³⁵⁵ David Ben-Gurion, “How Can the Birthrate Be Increased?” *Haaretz*, December 8, 1967, cited in Hazleton, *Israeli Women*, 63.

But the emphasis of Gush Emunim and the wider religious-Zionist community on demography, and the expectations placed on women in order to achieve the desired results, took on added layers of meaning due both to the explicitly religious and messianic nature of their political project, and the core mechanism of that project: homebuilding in occupied territory in order to expand the settlements. Within Gush Emunim's religious-nationalist framework—drawn from the same ideological soil as that of Kahane—women in the settlements had a foundational role to play, responsible as they were for the private realm which, in the occupied territories, had flipped into a site of national conflict.³⁵⁶ Striking almost identical notes to Jabotinsky and Kahane before them, Gush Emunim and their peers essentially tasked women with attending to the “home front”—one that factored in responsibilities such as child-rearing, maintaining a Jewish home, refraining from mixed relationships, and other complementarian roles that served the national-religious project.

The politicized nature of motherhood in the occupied territories is, as the Israeli sociologists Tamar El-Or and Gideon Aran have pointed out, fraught with contradictions. In particular, given the dangerous and often lawless nature of life in the settlements, there is, they write, a seemingly irreconcilable conflict between settling the land and reproducing the nation: one in which “[t]he full realization of the experience of motherhood would mean evacuation of the territories, or at least an acknowledgment of the contradiction between the wish to ensure the safety of one's children and the national conflict.”³⁵⁷ Yet this apparent Gordian Knot is one that women active in Gush Emunim, as well as the wider religious-Zionist settlement movement,

³⁵⁶ Michael Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2009), 216.

³⁵⁷ Tamar El-Or and Gideon Aran, “Giving Birth to a Settlement: Maternal Thinking and Political Action of Jewish Women on the West Bank,” *Gender and Society* 9, no. 1 (February 1995), 74.

faced head-on in the 1970s and beyond. When circumstances allowed them to knowingly politicize their roles as homemakers—what the Israeli sociologist Tamara Neuman has termed “maternal activism”—women’s political involvement beyond the domestic sphere was ostensibly more straightforward, not least because such activity blurred the boundary between the public and the private domain.³⁵⁸ Thus, for example, did women play a central role in ongoing efforts to settle Hebron in the 1970s, most notably in the 1979 takeover by dozens of women and children of an abandoned building, Beit Hadassah, in the heart of the city.³⁵⁹ The occupation of the building, which had lain empty and in ruins since its Jewish inhabitants had either been killed or fled as a result of the 1929 Hebron massacre, lasted for around a year, when the Israeli government finally relented and formally allowed Jewish families to permanently take up residence in Beit Hadassah. This extended protest, which paved the way for the establishment of the first Jewish settlement in occupied Hebron, saw women foreground their gender in order to claim a nonpolitical stance as mothers simply seeking to take care of their children in a building unfit for human habitation, thereby tapping into deep-seated traditional notions of domesticity, family, and the role both play in Jewish national and religious continuity.³⁶⁰ And on an even more intimate level, one of the leaders among the Hebron women settlers, Sarah Nachshon, became famous—and notorious—for circumcising each of her sons in the Cave of the Patriarchs/Ibrahimi Mosque, against the law, as a means of staking a national-religious claim to the site,

³⁵⁸ Tamara Neuman, “Maternal ‘Anti-Politics’ in the Formation of Hebron’s Jewish Enclave,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33, no. 2 (Winter 2004), 55.

³⁵⁹ One of the women leading this protest was Miriam Levinger, wife of Moshe Levinger. Born in the U.S., she was an old acquaintance of Libby Kahane—they had both been members of the religious-Zionist youth group Bnei Akiva, as had Meir Kahane. Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane, Vol. 1*, 173.

³⁶⁰ Tamara Neuman, *Settling Hebron: Jewish Fundamentalism in a Palestinian City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 70, 80.

while desecrating the mosque in the process by bringing in wine for the ritual.³⁶¹ Such activities highlighted the way in which women on the religious far right activated their “home front,” politicizing their otherwise largely circumscribed roles in the movement, and, in so doing, successfully eliciting the sympathies of those outside their ideological cohort.

The settler elite takes shape

Beyond building communities and populating them, however, expanding the settlements meant an even more basic requirement: preventing further partition of the land. To this end, Gush Emunim’s immediate priority as the 1977 national elections approached was to help install a right-wing government, which would, they believed, snuff out the threat of “land for peace” agreements and ensure that the land concession of 1974 remained an anomaly. Although the group’s promotional materials made clear that they did not view laws and directives as justification for stopping their settlement activity—any such restriction was “illegal and immoral” in light of the “fundamental Jewish right” to settle across the entirety of “Greater Israel”—they nonetheless sought a pro-settler national leadership, ideally led by Menachem Begin, whom they believed would help accelerate their goals.³⁶² The urgency of this mission intensified throughout the mid-1970s, as the minor Golan Heights withdrawal was followed by the Sinai Interim Agreement signed in September 1975, which arranged for Israel to leave part of the Egyptian territory. Gush Emunim characterized the accord as a failure of Israeli policy,

³⁶¹ Ibid, 72-3. Nachshon also famously faced off with Israeli soldiers in 1975 in order to bury the body of one of her sons, who had died in infancy, at the site of a former Jewish cemetery that was now Palestinian land. This incident, which entered the annals of settler lore, took on its narrative power precisely because of “the cultural value accorded to the religious and maternal roles [Nachshon] inhabited.” Ibid., 76.

³⁶² Gush Emunim, “Al Yishuv HaAretz.”

pointing out that Israel’s ruling coalition, led by Yitzhak Rabin in his first term as prime minister, was “the first government in Israel’s history to sign a withdrawal agreement that is not ending a war.”³⁶³ The group also criticized U.S. involvement in the deal and the ongoing peace talks that surrounded it, claiming that “American ‘support’ has left us unable to act independently.”³⁶⁴

As the above statement suggests, Gush Emunim was hostile toward official American involvement in Israeli politics, especially when it came to the settlements—a stance that occasionally translated into open protest.³⁶⁵ The group also at times appeared bullish toward the idea of enlisting global support for their project.³⁶⁶ Yet throughout the mid-1970s, Gush Emunim was involved in mutual support and outreach efforts that bubbled up on both sides of the Atlantic, and stepped up its efforts as the 1977 elections drew near. And the group had powerful admirers and generous donors in the U.S., even as progressive Jewish outfits warned about its disruptive influence in Israel.³⁶⁷ The head of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America, Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld, for example, declared his support for the group while visiting Jerusalem in July 1975, and announced the launch of an American “Friends of Emunim.” During the same press conference, Schonfeld also claimed that many members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations shared his views on the group, including the head of the

³⁶³ Gush Emunim, “Emdatenu HaMedinit B’Sha’a Zo,” [“Our Current Political Position”], February 11, 1976, National Library of Israel, Gush Emunim collection, 1842/1.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Gush Emunim, Flier advertising protest outside U.S. Embassy in Israel, July 14, 1975, National Library of Israel, Gush Emunim collection, 1842/2.

³⁶⁶ Gush Emunim, “Al Yishuv HaAretz.”

³⁶⁷ Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 295.

nominally centrist Zionist Organization of America, Rabbi Joseph Sternstein.³⁶⁸ The following April, Schonfeld spoke at a pro-Gush Emunim and pro-settlement rally outside the United Nations in New York; the demonstration had been inspired by and timed to coincide with a highly controversial, 20,000-strong march that Gush Emunim and its supporters staged in the West Bank, which provoked widespread unrest and violence.³⁶⁹ In January 1977, meanwhile, four months before Israel went to the polls, Gush Emunim invited a delegation of diaspora Jewish journalists visiting Israel to tour the West Bank settlements; in an open letter, the group stressed the importance of the settlements in the upcoming elections, and wrote that the visitors needed to “see the settlements for yourselves and get a first hand look at these young men women and children who realize in person the Zionist idea as they see it.”³⁷⁰ The same day Gush Emunim published this letter, they held a press conference (in Hebrew) in which they excoriated the Israeli government for “[d]egrading the national pioneering spirit” and undermining “*aliyah*” while driving Israelis to emigrate. The group outlined a public relations push aimed at convincing the wider population of the spiritual and political need for the settlements, as part of a campaign to bring about a favorable election outcome.³⁷¹

³⁶⁸ David Landau, “Head of Rabbinical Council of America Supports Gush Emunim,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, July 21, 1975. Sternstein also later came out against the US branch of the Israeli left-Zionist group Peace Now, joining Herut-U.S.A. head Harry Taubenfield in opposing their May 1978 open letter calling on Menachem Begin to work towards peace. “Peace Now Group Gains Support from Profs, U.S. Personalities,” *The Detroit Jewish News*, May 5, 1978.

³⁶⁹ Yitzhak Rabi, “Jewish Youths Hold Two Separate Rallies for and Against Gush Emunim, West Bank Settlements,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, April 20, 1976.

³⁷⁰ Gush Emunim, Letter to Jewish journalists, January 12, 1977, National Library of Israel, Gush Emunim collection, 1842/1.

³⁷¹ Gush Emunim, Press conference statement, 1977.

Two weeks later, a meeting exploring the establishment of an “International Friends of Gush Emunim” group took place in Israel; among other things, the nascent organization discussed holding English-language tours of the settlements and ensuring that relevant promotional materials were translated into other languages, with English being the priority.³⁷² The following month, a fresh U.S. chapter of Gush Emunim was formed. Its core mandate was to “energetically support the concept of the indivisibility of the Land of Israel, and the parallel right of free Jewish settlement anywhere therein,” according to Schonfeld, who was its founding director, having recently stepped down as head of the Rabbinical Council of America.³⁷³ And in April, Gush Emunim sent an open letter to world leaders—specifying that they considered the U.S. president to be chief among them—in which they insisted that they had no intention of expelling or humiliating Palestinians, and called on their audience “not to impede the fulfillment of the vision of the Tanakh [through the settlement of Jews throughout Greater Israel],” and “not to tear the people of Israel from their inheritance.”³⁷⁴

Even as vocal support for Gush Emunim in the U.S. gathered pace, however, it remained on the edges of the mainstream, and certainly did not have the visibility and impact of the JDL. Equally, the group’s transnational connections and activities remained sporadic and reactive. Yet domestically, Gush Emunim’s rise foreshadowed the coming dominance of the Israeli far right—

³⁷² Zvi Slonim, Letter announcing International Friends of Gush Emunim, January 1977, National Library of Israel, Gush Emunim collection, 1842/1.

³⁷³ “Emunim-U.S.A. Established Advances Goals of Gush Emunim,” *The Observer: The Official Newspaper of Stern College for Women*, February 24, 1977.

³⁷⁴ Gush Emunim, Open letter to world leaders, April 1977, National Library of Israel, Gush Emunim collection, 1842/1.

most immediately, through the election of Menachem Begin as Israel's first right-wing, explicitly pro-settler prime minister. Begin's May 1977 victory at the head of Likud, as much as it represented a sea change in Israeli politics, also marked a natural turning point resulting from a number of ongoing trends and crises in the country. Beyond the lasting trauma of the Yom Kippur War—whose political reckoning Begin and Likud, then in the opposition, had largely escaped—the existing Labor hegemony was fatally undermined by the formation, in 1976, of a centrist party—the Democratic Movement for Change—that siphoned votes off from the left-wing parties at the ballot box.³⁷⁵ At the same time, decades of racist discrimination, exclusion, and social engineering directed at Mizrahi Jews finally made a dent in electoral politics, as Begin exploited their long-running grievances and acknowledged their oppression at the hands of a secular, Ashkenazi left-wing elite. Promising to invest in the dilapidated, under-resourced development towns to which they had largely been confined since their arrival in the country during the 1950s and '60s, Begin won over a majority of Mizrahi voters, whose mass protest vote in the election became known as the “Ballot Rebellion”—and was a major factor in handing power to Likud.³⁷⁶

Within the far right itself, Begin's arrival into power represented both the resuscitation of the Revisionist legacy and the heralding of a renewed alliance between the secular and religious right that, with the occupation a decade old by the time of his electoral victory, once more had the acquisition and retention of territory as its uniting aim. And Begin's win also helped usher in

³⁷⁵ Shamir, *Summing Up*, 95.

³⁷⁶ Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel*, 141. Gush Emunim, too, briefly flirted with outreach to potential Mizrahi supporters; in early 1977, the group announced plans to recruit in development towns around the Israeli periphery, in hopes of drawing Mizrahim to the occupied territories. “Gush Emunim to operate in development towns,” *Haaretz*, January 24, 1977. Disaffected Mizrahi voters would be crucial to Kahane's electoral success the following decade.

a new era in relations between the Jewish far right in Israel-Palestine and the U.S.—not only in terms of the aforementioned revival of the U.S. arm of the Revisionist movement (with the JDL also celebrating his victory), but also through his wider appeal to a growing far-right coalition in the country. Thus, for example, did Begin start openly courting evangelical Christians who had previously been the subject of suspicion from Israeli governments, and whose own growing power that decade came to a head with the 1979 founding of Jerry Fallwell, Sr.’s Moral Majority—a deeply conservative political group that was also staunchly pro-Israel.³⁷⁷ Kahane had identified evangelicals as a potential key source of support several years earlier, organizing a “Christians for Zion” group and arguing that Israeli leaders’ secularity rendered them incapable of “seeing the most potent weapon that Israel has within the United States....the tens of fundamentalist and evangelical Christian Protestant sects.”³⁷⁸ But it took Begin’s intervention to truly kickstart what would become a politically crucial relationship between the Israeli right and conservative Christians. The new prime minister appointed an Evangelical liaison in his own office, and the U.S. branch of Herut welcomed an October 1977 advert placed in the *New York Times* by a group of prominent evangelical pastors, outlining their support for Israel and their maximalist stance

³⁷⁷ Evangelical Christians had, like religious Jews, been fired up by Israel’s victory in the Six-Day War, understanding the war and its outcome as having unfolded according to a divine plan. Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 217.

³⁷⁸ Meir Kahane, “Christians for Zion,” *Jewish Press*, January 24, 1975; Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane, Vol. 1*, 450. “It is the clear task of American Jews,” Kahane continued in his *Jewish Press* column, “to work to persuade the fundamentalist Christian community to organize an active and politically militant ‘Christians for Zion.’”

toward its territory.³⁷⁹ And Gush Emunim, too, moved to take advantage of the new alignment, with a small delegation visiting the U.S. in late 1977 in order to press the case for Greater Israel and to oppose looming Israel-Egypt talks.³⁸⁰ It was a tripartite relationship—between a far-right Israeli government, the Jewish far right in both countries, and the U.S. Evangelical far right—that would grow in depth and influence throughout the 1980s and beyond, on both sides of the Atlantic.

As for Kahane and his still-inchoate Kach movement, the 1977 elections brought him no closer to the Knesset: the party was trounced at the ballot box and remained severely short of funds, having weathered financial crises throughout the mid-1970s.³⁸¹ Moreover, the U.S. branch of his movement seemed to be moving on without him. Although he had formally stepped down as official head of the American group in 1972, Kahane had continued as its spiritual leader—a role he maintained via frequent trips back to the country after he had moved to Israel. He even managed to continue directing the group from behind bars, having been sentenced by a U.S. federal court in February 1975 to a year in jail for violating the terms of an earlier probation (testifying in support of the rabbi at his trial were several Russian Jews based in Israel, whose travel expenses were, reportedly, covered by Begin).³⁸² Yet shortly after he began his sentence,

³⁷⁹ Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 190; Herut - U.S.A., “Press Release: Chairman of U.S. Herut Party Praises Evangelicals,” November 1, 1977, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, folder G16/B/4. Even as parts of the U.S. Jewish far right began embracing Evangelicals over their hawkish brand of Zionism, other parts of the community expressed concern over their missionary efforts—which they feared would exacerbate the “continuity crisis” of increasing intermarriage. “Christian Evangelical Movement Poses Serious Threat to Jewish Community,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, December 4, 1972.

³⁸⁰ “Gush Delegation Arrives in the U.S.,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, December 15, 1977.

³⁸¹ Meeting minutes, JDL in Israel secretariat, January 27, 1974, Jabotinsky Institute archives, JDL collection, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

³⁸² Friedman, *False Prophet*, 179.

the JDL's Philadelphia chapter head, Bonnie Pechter, became the group's national director, and under her leadership the JDL began to focus its attention more exclusively on far-right antisemitism.³⁸³ During a summer 1977 visit to the U.S., Kahane began fundraising for his next Israeli election campaign, just as Pechter's JDL once again hit the headlines over its opposition to a planned neo-Nazi march in Skokie, Illinois. Kahane took advantage of the opportunity to descend on Skokie and once again tout the necessity of Jewish violence, as Pechter vowed the same, but behind the scenes a different conversation was playing out: Kahane claimed Pechter was making "empty threats" against the neo-Nazis and, in August 1977, he quit the group altogether, three months after his Israeli electoral humiliation.³⁸⁴

Despite these transatlantic setbacks, however, the 1977 elections provided an opportunity for Kahane where his 1973 loss had not: with the far-right Likud now in power and thus subject to the same strictures and compromises foisted upon any ruling party, Kahane was able to step even further into the role of the far-right populist gadfly. He assumed this role rapidly, sniping at the powers-that-be from the street, outflanking them from the right and, when the time came, offering a corrective vision to the government's supposed betrayal when it reached a land-for-peace deal with Egypt after a year in power. And indeed, Kach had already begun assuming that mantle during the 1977 election campaign, publishing a flier that included a warning about Likud: although Begin was opposed to territorial concessions, the document read, many in his party were prepared to exchange land for peace. The flier further criticized Likud's relative

³⁸³ Alisa H. Kesten, "Trends Analyses Report: The Jewish Defense League, An Update," *The American Jewish Committee*, April 29, 1980, 2-3, <https://www.bjpa.org/content/upload/bjpa/jewi/Jewish%20Defense%20League%20Update%20AJC%20Kesten.pdf>.

³⁸⁴ Friedman, *False Prophet*, 191-2; Kesten, "Trends Analyses," 2-3; Jewish Defense League, "The JDL Update" 1, no. 5, August 1977, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, JDL collection, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

secularity, even as it acknowledged that Kach would align with the party on national issues should Begin take power.³⁸⁵

The 1977 elections also saw Kach attempt to co-opt Gush Emunim as a political actor, even as Kahane had made efforts to align himself with them as a far-right settlement activist—going so far as to announce, in 1976, that he would join the National Religious Party, albeit in an attempt to push its constituency even further to the right.³⁸⁶ In that same campaign flier, Kahane praised Gush Emunim’s “formidable movement” at the same time as cautioning them against creating a political party; doing so, the flier read, would risk eroding that support (and splitting the religious far-right vote, which the document neglects to mention).³⁸⁷ Kach’s stance in this regard was boosted by a pre-election endorsement from Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, marking the

³⁸⁵ Kach, “Kach movement, founded by Rabbi Meir Kahane, ‘runs’ for 9th Knesset,” 1977, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, JDL collection, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

³⁸⁶ “Kahane to join NRP,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 18, 1976, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Kaf 24 - 10/4. There is much in the literature on the distaste of Gush Emunim’s personnel for Kahane and his brash provocations; Ami Pedahzur, for example, writes that the settlers were “extremely suspicious” of the rabbi and that Amana, Gush Emunim’s settlement arm founded in 1976, blocked state subsidies to a proposed settlement Kahane and his followers tried to establish. Pedahzur, *Triumph of Israel’s Radical Right*, 64-6. However, there were moments of cooperation, as when Kahane and Gush Emunim leader Hanan Porat were part of a group attempting to establish a new settlement outside Jericho in the occupied West Bank. Moreover, as Janet Dolgin argued in her fairly sympathetic anthropological portrait of the JDL in its early years, the group was defined by its “scholar” and “chaya (animal)” identities—the former responsible for formulating ideology and policy, and the latter responsible for implementing it. Janet Dolgin, *Jewish Identity and the JDL* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 77-8. This archetypal blend of religious learning and violent activism mirrors that described by Gideon Aran in his monograph on Gush Emunim, in which he characterizes its members as “students and alumni of yeshivot...fringes on their prayer shawls fluttering in the wind, a gun in their hands.” Gideon Aran, *Kookism: Shoreshei Gush Emunim, Tarbut Hamitnahalim, Teologiyah Tziyonit, Meshihiyut Bizmanenu [The Roots of Gush Emunim, Jewish Settlers’ Sub-Culture, Zionist Theology, and Contemporary Messianism]* (Jerusalem: Carmel Publishers, 2013), 16.

³⁸⁷ Kach, “Kach movement, founded by Rabbi Meir Kahane, ‘runs’ for 9th Knesset,” 1977, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

first time the Gush Emunim spiritual leader had officially supported a slate other than the National Religious Party.³⁸⁸

Yet as far as Gush Emunim was concerned immediately following the 1977 election, it needed neither Kach nor its own party to get its settlement needs met in the Knesset. In a post-election letter to the group's membership, Gush Emunim leader Hanan Porat celebrated a new government that would "drive forward aliyah [and] settlement" and stressed the importance of diaspora Jewish activism to help achieve both. At the same time, however, Porat struck a prescient note of caution, stressing that the arrival of a right-wing government, far from rendering the movement obsolete, made Gush Emunim's task more pressing than ever: getting that government to fulfill its duty to the settlement project.³⁸⁹

As it turned out, Porat's insistence that the movement was anything but obsolete would be proven false in the 1980s, due to Gush Emunim's relative success in institutionalizing the settlement movement and its willingness—at least at first—to try and work hand-in-glove with an ascendant parliamentary right-wing.³⁹⁰ Yet it was Porat's other point, about the need to make sure Begin stayed true to his word about advancing the settlements, that predicted the group's first existential challenge. Within months of assuming power, Begin—with an eye on maintaining relations with the Carter administration in the U.S., also sworn in that year—rejected Gush Emunim plans for a string of new settlements throughout the occupied West Bank.³⁹¹ The

³⁸⁸ Avraham Tirosh, "HaRav Kook Tomech BaReshimat Kahane" ["Rabbi Kook Supports Kahane's List"], *Maariv*, January 21, 1977.

³⁸⁹ Hanan Porat, Letter to Gush Emunim members and supporters, May 1977, National Library of Israel, Gush Emunim collection, 1842/1.

³⁹⁰ Pedahzur, *Triumph of Israel's Radical Right*, 59.

³⁹¹ "Israel Denies Settlement Approval," *New York Times*, September 27, 1977.

shock that Begin, for all his pre-election valorization of the settlement project, was not going to automatically sign off on every settlement proposal rippled throughout the far right; Kahane, too, criticized the Likud government's early record, using the occasion of his April 1978 trial for trespassing in Hebron to launch a broadside against "the shameful Judenrein policy that persists under the Begin government"—once again invoking a Nazi-era term that the Jewish far right had been deploying since at least the early 1950s, and engaging in the kind of Nazi comparisons that Begin himself was no stranger to.³⁹²

Yet far from being a blip, Begin's "betrayal" was in fact a harbinger of an even bigger threat to the Jewish far right: the 1978 Camp David Accords, which brought peace between Israel and Egypt in exchange for the former's withdrawal from the entire Sinai area it had occupied since 1967. This setback to the settlement project, like others before it, would further galvanize and radicalize some parts of the Israeli far right, while pushing others into accommodation—both processes that would, ultimately, translate into ever-greater levels of success and acceptance of its ideology.³⁹³ Thus would the 1980s see the gradual (if unofficial) dissolution of Gush Emunim, even as Kach finally—at the fourth attempt—won a seat in the Knesset. If in the wake of the

³⁹² Kach Movement, "Speech by Rabbi Meir Kahane at the Beer Sheva court, April 17, 1978, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, Kaf 24 - 10/4; Betar, "A Program for Zionism," 1953, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Bet 16/8, Folder 2.

³⁹³ Ehud Sprinzak has declared that the "Israeli radical right was born on September 17, 1978," the day Begin signed the Camp David Accords (his definition of "radical right" is drawn from that of American sociologists of the 1950s and 1960s, and broadly denotes an ideology of nativism, ultranationalism, religious fundamentalism, anticommunism, and militarism). Sprinzak is not claiming that there was no far right prior to 1978; indeed, much of his work is concerned with uncovering the activities of far-right Israeli groups since the founding of the state. Rather, he asserts that Begin's decision split the far right, causing the splintered-off factions that would come to define the "new" Israeli far right, most notoriously the Jewish Underground. While Sprinzak is correct that 1978 was a watershed moment, I find the sharpness of the distinction somewhat undermines the strong ideological through-currents from the pre-state Jewish far right through to the 1970s and beyond. Sprinzak, "The Emergence of the Israeli Radical Right," *Comparative Politics* 21, no. 2 (January 1989), 172.

1977 election Likud's victory was seen as a one-off interruption to Labor-Zionist parties' dominance of the government, as the 1980s wore on two trends would become clear: firstly, that Revisionist Zionism was in the government to stay, embodied by a Likud party that represented not only the historical evolution of the pre-state Revisionist Zionist and militia old guard into a statist institution, but that also fostered the coalition that would keep the far right in power. And secondly, that the longer Likud remained the dominant party, the more it acted as an institutional linchpin for the wider far right, including Kach and Gush Emunim—who themselves represented a merger between fundamentalist Judaism and Revisionist Zionism—to advance their political goals and normalize their ideology, even as the more radical edges of the movement increasingly adopted terrorism and other extremist tactics to achieve their aims.

In the U.S., too, trends that had revitalized and consolidated the Jewish far right throughout the 1970s would continue to develop throughout the 1980s: a growing alliance with hawkish elements of the GOP and with evangelical Christians, following Begin's lead and bolstered by a shared maximalist interpretation of Zionism; the ballooning of American-Jewish philanthropy, whose capital would increasingly be pumped into the most radical of West Bank (including East Jerusalem) settlements; and a developing tendency to use an attack-as-defense approach when seeking to tamp down criticism of Israeli government actions.

As the 1970s drew to a close, then, a broad transnational movement spanning the U.S. and Israel-Palestine—which had been robbed of its core mission by the founding of the State of Israel—was well on the way to revival. As in the past, it would be spurred along by a unified sense of purpose in the face of the threat of crisis. And this time round, its message would

eventually resonate enough to bring Kahane—amid denunciations of fascism, terrorism, and corruption—into the Israeli government.

Chapter 4: An Omen for the House of Israel

In early March 1982, as Israel prepared to evacuate the Yamit settlement before returning the Sinai to Egypt, a group of American Kach and JDL activists barricaded themselves inside an air raid shelter in the desert town and welded the door shut. The protesters, who had hunkered down with essential supplies and were vowing not to leave the settlement, were led by Yehuda Richter, a Los Angeles-born immigrant who would later on be jailed for participating in a shooting attack against a Palestinian bus near Hebron. Taking part, too, was Bat-Sheva Goldstein; her brother, Baruch, a Brooklyn-born doctor and devoted follower of Kahane who had recently immigrated to Israel, was also among the thousands of religious-Zionist hardliners who had made their way to Yamit in order to try and stop the withdrawal.³⁹⁴ As the weeks passed, with no sign of the Israeli government reversing course and as sand began to reclaim the gradually-emptying city, the group threatened a drastic escalation: passing a note from the bunker to Rabbi Yisrael Ariel, a graduate

³⁹⁴ Pedahzur and Perliger, *Jewish Terrorism in Israel*, 87; Wedding invitation from Baruch Goldstein to Israeli Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren, August 1, 1982, Israel State Archives, Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren collection, ISA-Privatecollections-NA-0013x1c. In a handwritten note on the back of the invitation, which features a photo of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif minus the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque, and the Temple depicted in their stead, Goldstein tells Goren that they met in Yamit and that he would like the rabbi to attend “the first wedding to be held on the Temple Mount...it is very important to me and to the matter in general—a first step to restoring Jewish sovereignty over the Temple Mount.” According to Libby Kahane, Israeli police prevented the couple from holding their nuptials in their intended location, but the ceremony was officiated by Kahane himself. Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane: His Life and Thought, Volume Two: 1976-1983* (Jerusalem: Institute for Publication of the Writings of Rabbi Meir Kahane, 2015), 369.

of Mercaz HaRav yeshiva who had taken the number two slot on the Kach list in the party's failed 1981 election bid, and then-chief rabbi of Yamit, the activists threatened to die by suicide as soon as the evacuation commenced—"one by one, every 120 minutes, until we are all dead."³⁹⁵

The youngsters' threat divided opinion on the Jewish far right in Israel—some leading members of Gush Emunim, such as Moshe Levinger, approved; many other prominent rabbis rejected the measure.³⁹⁶ Kahane himself, while having inspired his followers to lock themselves up in the shelter, nonetheless arrived in Yamit to persuade them not to carry out their threat, while negotiating with the Israeli army to allow them to stay put until the evacuation was complete.

The withdrawal from the Sinai, and the profound sense of crisis it elicited among the religious and secular Jewish far right symbolized, and helped advance, two interrelated trends that had begun in the 1970s and would change the face of the transnational far right—and Israeli society with it—over the course of the 1980s. The first trend was the far right's increasing disillusionment with the Israeli government, which had emerged in response to the 1974 return of part of the Golan Heights and greatly accelerated as a result of the Camp David Accords, the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement that led to the return of the Sinai. This dissatisfaction elicited differing responses within the movement. One faction sought, especially in the wake of the Yamit crisis, to pursue a course of parallel institution-building, pushing for religious-Zionist

³⁹⁵ Nir Hasson, "The pullout will pull no heart strings," *Haaretz*, February 7, 2005, <https://www.haaretz.com/2005-02-08/ty-article/the-pullout-will-pull-no-heart-strings/0000017f-e298-d568-ad7f-f3fbffd10000>; Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane, Vol. Two*, 348. The recollection regarding sand stealing over the city comes from Hasson's interview with the late sociologist Michael Feige, who had gone, as a researcher, to observe the settlement's final weeks.

³⁹⁶ Hellinger, Hershkowitz, and Susser, *Religious Zionism*, 76.

education and campaigning, which led to new schools, yeshivot, and higher education institutions that insisted on both rigid religious observance and preparation for the military. A competing faction on the Israeli far right, meanwhile, rejected bureaucratization and embraced radicalism and, with it, an increasing tilt toward terrorism among its various arms. And within that faction, a further trend—made highly visible by the dramatic episode in Yamit—was the extent to which the extremist vanguard of the Jewish far right in Israel, led by Kahane, was disproportionately populated by American Jews, some of whom would go on, through acts of terrorism, to alter the course of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.³⁹⁷ Indeed, mere weeks after the Kach group barricaded themselves in that Sinai bunker, another Kahane-supporting American-Jewish immigrant, Alan Goodman, opened fire in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and killed two Palestinians while wounding numerous others. Goodman, a 30-year-old Baltimore native who had moved to Israel in 1980, had a number of JDL leaflets in his Jerusalem accommodation.³⁹⁸ He told police officers he had acted out of a desire for “revenge” for Palestinian violence against Israelis; after the shooting, Kahane launched a media campaign on

³⁹⁷ This phenomenon did not go unremarked upon by the Israeli commentariat. In a 1980 article, the late, now-disgraced journalist and editor Yaacov Haelyon named Meir Kahane among a group of American-Jewish immigrants to Israel who “gave up their American passports” and “took up leadership roles in every extremist group” on the left and right in their adopted country. Yaacov Haelyon, “Anshei HaK’tzavot Gam MiYamin v’GamMiSmol Alu MiAmerica” [“Figures on the right- and left-wing edges immigrated from America”], *Maariv*, February 22, 1980.

³⁹⁸ Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane, Vol. 2*, 350. Although Kahane denied any formal connection to Goodman, the latter was represented by Kach’s lawyer, Leorit Daniel, a former Olympian and activist with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel who later chaired its board. Pressed by journalist Yair Kotler on this apparent discrepancy, Daniel insisted that Kahane “doesn’t possess any racist views” and that wanting to preserve a Jewish majority is “the norm of a country, to defend itself by preventing an Arab majority.” “Hechel Mishpat Alan Goodman Sh’Hitbatzer BaMisgad Omar” [“Trial of Alan Goodman, Who Holed Up in the Mosque of Omar, Begins”], *Davar*, September 9, 1982; Tom Segev, “Hem Y’ganu Gam Al Kahane Ad Tipat Dam HaAhrona” [“They’ll Also Defend Kahane to the Last Drop of Blood”], *Koteret Rashit*, September 11, 1985; Kotler, *Heil Kahane*, 161.

the need to “remove” non-Jews from the Temple Mount.³⁹⁹

On the other side of the Atlantic, meanwhile, the growing hawkishness among sections of the American-Jewish community would develop even further in the 1980s. In particular, the neoconservative wing of the American-Jewish far right reached new heights of power, buoyed by the Reagan presidency and by a shifting geopolitical calculus as the end of the Cold War approached and a new bipolar framework emerged, with Islamic fundamentalism overtaking communism as the omnipresent foe needing to be vanquished. This evolving global reality, and the fruition of long-gestating domestic economic processes, changed the power dynamics of the American-Jewish community at home and girded, through financial donations, the religious settler movement overseas.

The 1980s would be perhaps the most pivotal decade of all for the transnational Jewish far right. Existing trends and realities on the ground, such as the political dominance of the right and the occupation, became further entrenched, while social, political, and cultural ructions—some of which seemed to be in conflict with those trends—accumulated throughout the decade, from territorial concessions and the Israel-Lebanon War to the discovery of a Jewish terrorist network in the West Bank, economic upheaval, and the opening shots of the first intifada, the Palestinian uprising sparked in December 1987 when an Israeli military vehicle hit a truck carrying four residents of Jabalia, Gaza, killing all the occupants. All these developments would

³⁹⁹ William Claiborne, “Two Killed In Mosque In Israel,” *Washington Post*, April 12, 1982. In a scene that bears resemblance to the one that would unfold in Hebron twelve years later, Goodman entered the shrine in his Israeli army uniform, brandishing an automatic rifle. Ironically, however, his actions may have contributed to the failure of another planned attack on the Dome of the Rock: according to Jewish Underground member Haggai Segal, Goodman’s assault led to increased surveillance and security around the compound, which significantly undermined the later plan to blow it up. Haggai Segal, *Achim Yekarim: Korot ‘HaMachteret HaYehudit’ [Dear Brothers: History of the Jewish Underground]* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1987), 157.

bring the transatlantic Jewish far right into a new phase of political and cultural power, with the sense of repeated crises galvanizing the movement in each country and pushing its adherents to respond to local conditions, while also deepening the transnational relationship as global conditions pushed them closer together.

‘A complete organic entity’

The impact of the Israel-Egypt peace agreement on the Jewish far right in Israel was immediate, even as it took years for the accords to be fully implemented. For a movement that understood “Greater Israel” as an indivisible organism that included both the land and the nation—Tzvi Yehuda Kook classed it as “a complete organic entity...connected and united with the entire Jewish people”—the prospect of further partition represented both a spiritual and physical dismemberment.⁴⁰⁰ For Kook’s followers in particular, among them Gush Emunim, the Begin government’s concessions represented the breach of a long-held principle that had underpinned the religious-Zionist worldview since its articulation by Avraham Isaac Kook: that it was permissible to hasten redemption by partnering with and making use of the secular state in order to achieve its maximalist goals, in advance of the presumed return of all non-observant Jews to the religious fold.

Within much of the literature on the Israeli far right, this construct—a kind of accommodationist messianism—is assumed to contain the raw material for the Israeli religious far right’s radicalization from the mid-1970s onwards, and particularly at the end of that decade and throughout the majority of the next, setting the stage for a new normal of Jewish terrorism.

⁴⁰⁰ Quoted in Motti Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount: Who Will Build the Third Temple?* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009), 10.

In support of this thesis, scholars such as Ian Lustick, Motti Inbari, Ami Pedahzur, and Ehud Sprinzak have pointed both to the Israeli far right's sacralization of political activism, and to its assessment that if even a far-right hero such as Begin could not be relied upon to advance the movement's goals, then more drastic action—including against the state itself—was called for. Indeed, in his path-breaking book on the Israeli radical right, Sprinzak maintains that, at least post-1948, this constituency “was only articulated politically...as a reaction to the Camp David accords,” and was a maturation of ideologies that had appeared in the wake of the Six-Day War.⁴⁰¹ Yet although this is, particularly with regard to Gush Emunim, true in a narrow sense—the feeling of betrayal pushed some right-wing rabbis to move away from the idea of the state as a vehicle for redemption, opening the path for far-right activists to struggle against the government—it overlooks the extent to which the far-right settler movement had, since its inception, goaded, threatened, and cajoled the government into acceding to its demands. Such a framework also elides the historical continuities in Israeli far-right ideology and action, cordoning off the occupation as an aberrant phenomenon rather than an integral part of Israel's governance and political culture. In this rendering, the occupation—and efforts to reverse it—are the primary trigger for far-right settlement activity, rather than playing an ancillary role in an overall logic of expansion and expulsion that operates on both sides of the Green Line, predates the Six-Day War, and has never been exclusively religious in nature.

Moreover, focusing only on the domestic causes of the growth of the Israeli far right in the 1970s and 1980s once more sidesteps the transnational dimension of the Jewish far right—within which Kahane and the JDL had been militating against the Israeli (and American)

⁴⁰¹ Sprinzak, *Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right*, 5.

government for years. The JDL in Israel/Kach was an explicitly political venture—one that began life in the United States, to be sure, but that also became an ingrained part of the Israeli sociopolitical scenery and which continued to define itself as a revolutionary, oppositional force in the country, no matter who was in power. What characterized the changes within the transnational Jewish far right in the wake of 1978, then, was not so much its political efflorescence—which had commenced in the late 1960s—but rather its adaptation to a boom-and-bust cycle that would see the movement institutionalize and radicalize in parallel.

This process was encapsulated in what was perhaps the most immediately visible consequence of the Camp David Accords, as concerns the Jewish far right: the formation of new groups and breakaway factions, both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary, that opposed the deal—including lawless gangs intent on sowing havoc that would fatally undermine the Accords. The most notorious of these, the Jewish Underground, came out of Gush Emunim, which was already facing internal divisions due to its paradoxical experience of success and failure under the Begin government. The settler group’s increasing alignment with the political establishment in the wake of the 1977 elections, which fed its growing institutionalization, would lead in 1980 to the formation of the Yesha Council—the official body of the settlement movement.⁴⁰² Yet that very success, and its accompaniment by the state’s perceived betrayals—whether the Camp David Accords or an October 1979 Supreme Court ruling against a landmark Gush Emunim settlement

⁴⁰² Hellinger, Hershkowitz, and Susser, *Religious Zionism*, 56; Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler and Cas Mudde, *The Israeli Settler Movement: Assessing and Explaining Movement Success* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 75. “Yesha” is the Hebrew acronym for the three main regions administered by the council: “Judea” (“Yehuda,” the southern West Bank), “Samaria” (“Shomron,” the northern West Bank), and Gaza (“Aza”).

in the West Bank—provoked disillusionment and frustration among the group, causing an extremist faction of around two dozen members to splinter off and embrace more extreme forms of political violence.⁴⁰³ The Jewish Underground promptly began carrying out terror attacks against Palestinian targets, while simultaneously plotting to blow up the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque in order to try and derail the peace deal with Egypt and avoid the loss of the Sinai. A similar plot was cooked up by the Gal Underground, formed in 1978 and led by Yoel Lerner, another Brooklyn-born Kahane follower who had torched two Christian institutions in Jerusalem four years earlier.⁴⁰⁴

The Likud, meanwhile, faced its own rebellion: a combination of religious and secular territorial hardliners, including Gershon Salomon, the leader of the Temple Mount Faithful; Geulah Cohen, formerly of the Irgun; and Moshe Shamir, one of the founders of the Movement for Greater Israel, left the ruling party and grouped together with leading Gush Emunim activists to form what eventually became Tehiya, an ultranationalist political party that combined the new and old guard of the Israeli far right.⁴⁰⁵ Led by Cohen, the party also included the firebrand settler leader Daniella Weiss, and had the tacit backing of Tzvi Yehuda Kook.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ Hellinger, Hershkovitz, and Susser,, *Religious Zionism*, 56.

⁴⁰⁴ “10 Jewish Militants Accused of Plotting Coup in Israel,” *The Miami Herald*, August 12, 1978; Pedahzur, *Triumph of Israel’s Radical Right*, 82.

⁴⁰⁵ The Temple Mount Faithful, founded in the late 1960s, is a protest and advocacy group that campaigns for the Third Temple to be built on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism*, 81.

⁴⁰⁶ Robert I. Friedman, *Zealots for Zion: Inside Israel’s West Bank Settlement Movement* (New York, NY: Random House, 1992), 140. Weiss’ parents, who moved to Palestine from the U.S. and joined Lehi, became active in Herut and then Likud, including campaigning for Benjamin Netanyahu. Yoni Kampinsky, “Daniella Weiss: LeHapil Et HaMemshala, Netanyahu Lo Haya Ne’eman BaEretz Yisrael” [“Daniella Weiss: Bring Down the Government, Netanyahu Did Not Believe in the Land of Israel”], *Arutz Sheva*, January 6, 2022, <https://www.inn.co.il/news/537082>.

The American-Jewish far right reacted somewhat less vigorously to the prospect of withdrawal from the Sinai, even as American Jews in Israel were among those leading the charge against the Camp David Accords. While Kahane, in his dual roles as American and Israeli agitator, publicly slammed Begin for his part in the Israel-Egypt peace deal, right-wing Jewish media outlets were more restrained: *Commentary*, including hawkish editor Norman Podhoretz, welcomed the deal, while the Orthodox *Jewish Press*—Kahane’s longtime media home—threatened to cut the rabbi off over his anti-Begin rants.⁴⁰⁷ There were likely several factors governing the lack of opposition to the Accords: firstly, a general deference among right-leaning American-Jewish groups and leaders to the government of Israel, especially a Likud government; secondly, the greater secularity of the American-Jewish far right, which meant less spiritual attachment to the Sinai desert; and thirdly, relatedly, the prioritization of Israel’s security above religious imperatives—which, given that Egypt represented the country’s biggest threat, made a peace deal between the two countries a key strategic win.⁴⁰⁸ Beyond Kahane and his political circle, the accords largely did not register as a crisis among the American-Jewish far right in the way it did among the Israeli far right. Yet by the time the Sinai pullout finally occurred in the spring of 1982, another conflict was brewing in the Middle East—a war that would, like the one before it in 1973, herald a new phase for the Jewish far right in both countries.

⁴⁰⁷ Friedman, *False Prophet*, 196-7; Balint, *Running Commentary*, 120.

⁴⁰⁸ Waxman, *Trouble in the Tribe*, 99. The presence of a religiously fundamentalist far right in the American-Jewish community is a self-limiting phenomenon, as such views generally drive adherents to emigrate to Israel.

‘The incredible pollution of the sacred Jewish seed’

Before then, however, came a pivotal moment for Meir Kahane. As in the previous decade, he began the 1980s by deploying provocative and opportunistic publicity and electoral campaigns, aimed both at inciting his base of supporters around the Camp David Accords, and positioning himself and Kach as the answer to both the still-hegemonic Labor Zionists and the disappointing performance of Begin as prime minister.⁴⁰⁹ In so doing, Kahane was able to exploit his political camp’s mixed fortunes while homing in on the messages that would become the calling cards of his Israeli political career. Kahane’s ongoing fixation with assimilation and mixed relationships evolved into zealous efforts to prevent relationships between Jewish women and Palestinian men. His calls to expel all Palestinians from the area of “Greater Israel,” for which he had already become notorious, intensified. And he fully took up the mantle of campaigning on behalf of Mizrahim, at once essentializing them by holding them up as an idealized example of Jews who had maintained their traditions and separateness in the exile (in contrast to assimilated Western European and American Jews), and then using their exploitation and alienation at the hands of the state as ammunition with which to attack the Labor-Zionist hegemony.

Throughout the early 1980s, Kach became more explicit about seeking out the Mizrahi vote, looking to appropriate a still-emerging right-wing political constituency that had proved its influence in the 1977 election. Indeed, as the decade began, the issue of Israel’s so-called “ethnic demon”—the great disparities between Jews of European origin and those of Middle Eastern and North African origin, fueled by decades of social and political discrimination—was rapidly

⁴⁰⁹ In 1983, a few months before Begin resigned, Meir Kahane told CNN anchor Sandi Freeman that the prime minister had been a “disappointment,” specifically mentioning the Sinai withdrawal, and claimed that he wanted to “be in the Knesset to make Mr. Begin Mr. Begin again.” Sandi Freeman, interview with Meir Kahane, *CNN*, March 10, 1983.

becoming central to Kahane's political messaging and his overlapping obsessions with racial and religious purity.⁴¹⁰ The core aspects of this trio of issues—keeping Jewish women away from non-Jewish (and particularly Muslim) men, ridding the country of Palestinians, and using the plight of Mizrahim to advance his political fortunes—coalesced in one of the most despised of Kahane's many bêtes noires: the prospect of romantic and sexual relationships between Mizrahi women and Palestinian men.

The idea that Mizrahi and Sephardi women were particularly vulnerable, as he saw it, to the entreaties of Palestinian men was not a new one for Kahane. As early as 1967, according to his widow Libby Kahane, he was hearing stories from Moshe Tanami, an Israeli rabbi then on a fundraising trip in the U.S., about Palestinian men luring disadvantaged young Mizrahi women into relationships under false pretenses. Those Palestinians then, Tanami claimed, “forced them into marriage and living in Arab villages.”⁴¹¹ Yet Kahane's focus on Mizrahim in general, and therefore his neuroses about Mizrahi women in particular, scaled up following a stint in Ramle prison in 1980, where he spent six months in administrative detention for his alleged involvement in a plot to blow up the Dome of the Rock.⁴¹² It was while in this prison cell that

⁴¹⁰ “Once we hook them, we emphasize two things,” Kahane told the journalist Robert Friedman in 1980 as he accompanied the rabbi to a depressed Jerusalem neighborhood for an event with young Mizrahim. “First, Arabs. They don't like Arabs. They come from Arab countries. Second, poverty. When we speak of poverty, we speak of spiritual poverty. The reaction to being poor and how one copes with it is different when one has values. The Jews in [the Haredi Jerusalem neighborhood] Mea Shearim have twelve kids and live in two rooms and don't go out and commit crimes.” Friedman, *False Prophet*, 212.

⁴¹¹ Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane, Vol. 1*, 86.

⁴¹² Yoav Peled, “Meir Kahane,” in *Hamishim Ad Arbaim v'Shmoneh: Momentim Bikorti'im BaToldot Medinat Yisrael [Fifty to Forty-Eight: Critical Moments in the History of the State of Israel]*, ed. Adi Ophir (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute, 1999), 321; Tzvi Zinger, “HaRav Meir Kahane Neetzar 'Lefi Tzav Minhali Chatum Al Yadei Weizman” [“Rabbi Meir Kahane Arrested ‘Under Administrative Order signed by Weizman’”], *Maariv*, May 14, 1980.

Kahane both had extended close contact with Mizrahi Jews, and wrote one of his most infamous texts, *They Must Go* (“they” being Palestinians).⁴¹³

The book’s notoriety stems primarily from its reputation as a manifesto for ethnic cleansing, which interweaves an extended argument as to why Israel cannot be both Jewish and democratic, and then presents those two aspects as inextricably linked. *They Must Go* repeatedly states that accepting a democracy in Israel is equivalent to accepting the possibility that Palestinians would become the majority and eventually lead the country. (Kahane also used this claim to accuse his liberal critics of hypocrisy, pointing out that they were no more amenable than he to the idea of living in a Palestinian-majority country.)⁴¹⁴ Less famously, the text also, doubtless unintentionally, points to the internal contradictions of a transnational Jewish far-right movement that demanded both the activism and obsolescence of the diaspora. Reflecting on Israelis who have never known the diasporic experience, Kahane wrote: “What of all the dry bones of Israel who have neither Jewish skin nor flesh nor veins nor spirit?”—asserting, on the one hand, that one can only be a fully realized Jew in a Jewish state, while also charging that one cannot be fully Jewish without having experienced life as a minority.⁴¹⁵

Yet although the claim of a zero-sum game between demography and democracy forms the bulk of the book, *They Must Go* also contains consistent references to Mizrahim, and especially Mizrahi women, that gesture at why Kahane saw mixed relationships—above all between Mizrahi women and Palestinian men—as the prime example of the harm caused by

⁴¹³ Meir Kahane, *They Must Go* (New York, NY: Grosset and Dunlap, 1981). The book was translated into Hebrew as *Thorns in Your Eyes*.

⁴¹⁴ Kahane, *They Must Go*, 58.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

trying to square the circle of a “Jewish and democratic” state.⁴¹⁶ Kahane further related this to the fate of Mizrahim within an Ashkenazi state, and tied all these threads together by making the case that banishing Palestinians, democracy, and secularism from Israel can only take place as part of a single, symbiotic process.

Kahane duly prefaced the book by reflecting on his encounters with “Adani,” whom he described as a “veteran Yemeni Jewish criminal” occupying the cell next to his.⁴¹⁷ The rabbi used these anecdotes as a springboard for arguing that the overrepresentation of Mizrahim among Israel’s (Jewish) prison population was due to their “spiritual destruction” at the hands of the Ashkenazi majority, before concluding that Mizrahim appreciate him more than do Ashkenazim, as they know what it is like to “live with an Arab majority.”⁴¹⁸ The book is thereafter peppered with Kahane’s racialized reflections on natality and women’s reproductive capacities. Thus, for example, did he name babies as “[t]he great Arab weapon in the battle against Jewish Israel,” an idea he would return to frequently throughout the decade; elsewhere, he lamented the declining

⁴¹⁶ For Kahane, much of the issue boiled down to a single question—“Do the Arabs have the right to be the majority in Israel?”—that he took to hurling at his detractors and hecklers. Carla Hall, “The Message of Meir Kahane,” *Washington Post*, September 11, 1984. In the exchange Hall witnessed, conducted following an acrimonious event with Kahane in a Maryland Jewish community center, the rabbi added, “If they say yes [to Arabs having the right to be a majority], they are of course democrats but anti-Zionist. If they say no they are Kahane except they are not quite as bright.”

⁴¹⁷ Kahane, *They Must Go*, 1-2.

⁴¹⁸ Meir Kahane, *They Must Go* (1981), 1. Prefacing his treatises on Mizrahi Jews with anecdotes about those he met while in prison became a recurring tactic for Kahane; in Kach’s 1986 booklet “The Black Book,” about the left’s mistreatment of Mizrahim, this role is played by “Mordechai,” a 14-year-old boy with “big, sad eyes” whom Kahane meets while jailed in Jerusalem and whose story embodies many of the tropes Kahane relied upon to rouse his followers. According to Kahane, “Mordechai,” who is in jail for petty crimes, lives in a tiny Jerusalem apartment with an alcoholic father, a mother who works to support the family, and a 17-year-old sister who recently had an abortion after sleeping with a Palestinian whom she met in a Jerusalem nightclub. Kach, “The Black Book: What the Left Did to Mizrahim, the Spiritual Holocaust in the Land of Israel” (Jerusalem, 1986), 2, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Kaf 24 - 10/4. The cover of the booklet features white text on a black background; the last letter of the word “Mizrah” is shown steeped in blood, with red drops descending into a pool of blood filled with the names of Middle Eastern and North African countries: Iraq, Iran, Morocco, Libya, etc. Here, as elsewhere in Jewish far-right discourse and imagery, the boundary between spiritual and physical injury is erased.

birthrate among Mizrahi women, claiming they were being influenced by social workers, as well as seeking to emulate “the supposedly more ‘cultured’ Ashkenazim.”⁴¹⁹ Moreover, Kahane warned, the declining “traditionalism” of Mizrahim—engineered by the Ashkenazi hegemony—threatened to lower their birth rate even further, compounded by the legalization of abortion.⁴²⁰ And to complete the portrait, Kahane cautioned that amid a general uptick in relationships between Jewish women and Palestinian men—facilitated, he claimed, by government-sponsored coexistence projects—Mizrahi women were likely to seek out such partnerships in order to escape their socioeconomic circumstances, while Ashkenazi women did so out of a sense of rebelliousness.⁴²¹

Kahane’s claims about Mizrahi women in *They Must Go* reveal both his existing attitudes toward gender and racial purity, and his ongoing acclimation to Israel’s internal politics—as well as the how those two thought processes would come to intersect as he drew closer to, and then entered, the Knesset. That Kahane entirely stripped Mizrahi women of their agency in his diagnoses and predictions was of a piece with his broader conceptualization of women as reproducers of the nation, responsible for bearing children, raising them with Jewish traditions, maintaining a Jewish home, and little else. It also reflected his paternalistic attitude toward Mizrahim, onto whom he projected a kind of naive innocence destroyed by the Labor-Zionist governing elite—embracing, to paraphrase Susan Sontag, a “fascist version of the old idea of the

⁴¹⁹ Kahane, *They Must Go*, 99, 107.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 222.

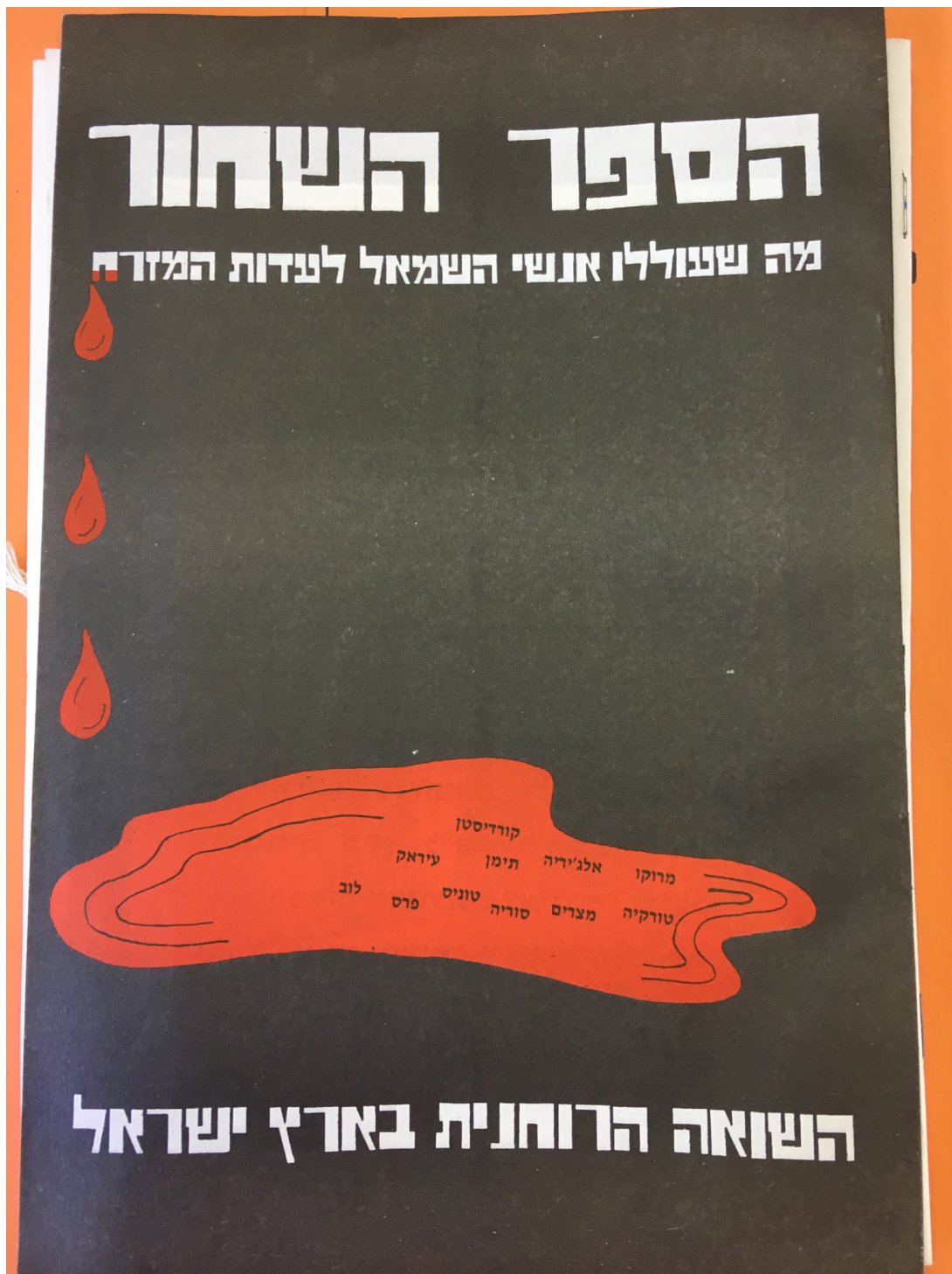


Fig 4.1: Kach, "The Black Book: What the Left Did to Mizrahim, the Spiritual Holocaust in the Land of Israel" (Jerusalem, 1986). The pool of blood at the bottom names some of the MENA countries and regions from which Mizrahi Jews hail: Morocco, Turkey, Algeria, Egypt, Kurdistan, Yemen, Syria, Tunisia, Iraq, Iran, and Libya.

Noble Savage.”⁴²² Yet his singling out of Mizrahi women—whose identity represented for him the pinnacle of racial and religious purity—was also his own take on the larger, societal neurosis in Israel that Mizrahim threaten the essence of the Zionist project, either by hewing too close to the languages and cultures of the Middle East and North Africa, thus undermining Israel’s desired “European” character, or by crossing the “color line” and forming liaisons—romantic, political or otherwise—with Palestinians.⁴²³

At the heart of these fears is the idea that it is a short step from resembling or fraternizing with “the enemy” to becoming effectively a part of that “enemy”—even as Israel officially exploits such proximities toward national security ends, by recruiting Mizrahim as spies and counter-terrorism agents.⁴²⁴ Yet even as Kahane’s excessive focus on Mizrahi women reflected those fears, his stance on the place and meaning of Mizrahi otherness in Israeli society differed in important, and revealing, ways. Where the establishment saw a proximity to Islam and MENA culture that represented the threat of over-identification, Kahane believed he saw a political constituency that had internalized a hatred of Arabs in the diaspora, and was therefore more

⁴²² Susan Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism,” *New York Review of Books*, February 6, 1975, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1975/02/06/fascinating-fascism/>.

⁴²³ See, for example, Rachel Shabi, *Not the Enemy: Israel’s Jews from Arab Lands* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel* (; Shohat, *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Visions*; Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Raz-Krakotzkin, “Zionist Return to the West.”

⁴²⁴ This anxiety has long played out in Israeli popular culture, and continues to today—notably in numerous productions that have been brought to the international market. Television shows such as *Faada* (2015), *Valley of Tears* (2020), *The Spy* (2019), and *Tehran* (2020), for example, all feature Mizrahi characters working in counterterrorism and counterintelligence, a role made possible by their physical resemblance to “the enemy” (whether Palestinians, Iranians, etc). When one of these operatives over-identifies with their target, sometimes to the point of perceived betrayal (including excessive assimilation), they either meet with a grisly end or engage in an act of spectacular violence against said enemy as a means of redemption and rededication to the Zionist project. For more on the history and present of Mizrahi cultural representation, see Shirly Bahar, *Documentary Cinema in Israel-Palestine: Performance, the Body, the Home* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2021); Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East-West and the Politics of Representation* (New York, NY: I.B. Tauris, 1989); Shemer, *Identity, Place, and Subversion*.

likely to welcome his segregationist and expulsionist impulses. Where the Ashkenazi hegemony saw primitivism, lack of culture, and superstition, Kahane saw admirable fealty to tradition, respect for Jewish law, and a devotion to Jewish chosenness. And, relatedly, where Ashkenazim saw in Mizrahim a kind of “return of the repressed,” who brought a reminder of the “eastern” otherness European Jews had had projected onto them in the diaspora and which they had fought so hard to disinherit, Kahane saw a community of Jews who had preserved their customs in exile and resisted sacrificing their heritage on the altar of gentile approval. In Kahane’s telling, this dynamic positioned Mizrahi Jews as the true inheritors of a Jewish state that had, since its inception, treated them variously as interlopers, degenerates, and “human dust, with no Jewish or human culture...[who] need a long course of education and civilization before they can occupy their proper place in society.”⁴²⁵

Kahane therefore conducted his own Orientalization of Mizrahi Jews, and in so doing presented Mizrahi women as uniquely threatened (and thus a unique threat to the integrity of the Jewish nation)—but for reasons that lay outside the bounds of their own decisions or desires. Rather than claiming, as much of the Ashkenazi establishment did, that Mizrahim could not be trusted, either due to having mixed loyalties or lacking the acculturation to become fully functional citizens, Kahane instead portrayed them as entirely victims of circumstance, of the

⁴²⁵ Quoted in G.N. Giladi, *Discord in Zion: Conflict Between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews in Israel* (Northampton, MA: Interlink Publishing Group, 1990), 209. On the fears of the Ashkenazi hegemony that Mizrahim were importing the “Ostjuden” mentality and character into Israel, see Aziza Khazzoom, “The Great Chain of Orientalism: Jewish Identity, Stigma Management, and Ethnic Exclusion in Israel,” *American Sociological Review* 68, no. 4 (August 2003), 481-510. Khazzoom cautions that this divide is not so simple as that, however: as is habitually the case with matters of internal colonization, of which the case of Mizrahim in Israel bears some hallmarks, there was very often more commonality between the elites of each group—in terms of languages spoken, dress, custom, etc—than between different classes within each group. Khazzoom, “Great Chain,” 487. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin has characterized the push to “negate the exile,” which he defines as the “core of Zionist consciousness,” as “the negation of all that was considered ‘Oriental’ in the Jews,” and thus immigration to Israel as “the overcoming of oriental elements.” Raz-Krakotzkin, “Zionist Return to the West,” 167.

state, and of Palestinian cunning (he persistently warned, for example, of Palestinian men pretending to be Jewish in order to seduce Jewish women). The combination of Ashkenazi neglect and (real or imagined) Palestinian contact had led to, he wrote later, “[t]he incredible pollution of the sacred Jewish seed that preserved its purity in the Exile of Africa and Asia, only to become abominated in the Holy Land.”⁴²⁶

The rabbi’s personal rendition of Mizrahi otherness was complicated and contrary in yet further ways, which say much about his understanding of the diaspora culture he left behind and the “native” culture he believed he was entering when he moved to Israel. As we have seen, Kahane understood sovereignty and a full embrace of Jewish tradition, heritage, and separateness (which went hand-in-hand with chosenness) as inextricable from Jewish masculinity; in his algorithm for Jewish strength and pride, any embrace of universalism or move toward acculturation in the diaspora was a form of emasculation.⁴²⁷ By elevating the Mizrahi diaspora experience (in religious-nationalist terms) above that of Jews in “the West,” and particularly in the U.S., Kahane was therefore also making an implicit, gendered value-judgment about each social group. This, too, inverted a derogatory stereotype projected onto Mizrahim as bearers of “Easternness”: whereas the Western observer constructed Arabs in particular and Middle Easterners in general as effeminate in their perceived exoticism, Kahane—by presenting Mizrahim as more authentically Jewish and in touch with their heritage—made a subtextual

⁴²⁶ Meir Kahane, “Forty Years,” *Kahane: The Magazine of the Authentic Jewish Idea* (Winter, 1984), YIVO, US Territorial Collection: RG 117 Box 47.

⁴²⁷ Kahane more than once likened what he viewed as assimilation to castration, for example in a 1985 *Jewish Press* column criticizing mixed relationships, discussed below, and in his 1987 book *Uncomfortable Questions for Comfortable Jews*, in which he accused secular schools of “educationally castrat[ing] Jewish children.” Meir Kahane, *Uncomfortable Questions for Comfortable Jews* (Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart Inc., 1987), 268.

point about Jewish masculinity remaining intact among those communities.⁴²⁸ While in the U.S., according to Kahane, Jewish manliness was threatened by the abjection and temptations of exile and assimilation—bound up in the figure of the gentile woman—in Israel, such threats were neutralized, above all among Mizrahi Jews who had, in Kahane’s mind, resisted the call of acculturation. In Israel, rather, it was Jewish—and especially Mizrahi—*womanhood* that demanded protection, an imperative that could only be fulfilled by total racial segregation and, eventually, the expulsion of all Palestinians from the country.

In its instrumentalist and one-dimensional character, Kahane’s understanding and exploitation of the histories of MENA Jewish communities had much in common with the revisionist histories put forward by the Israeli establishment, wherein the Spanish Inquisition, for example, was seen as merely a “foreshadowing” of the Holocaust.⁴²⁹ His “pogromization” of Mizrahi history, in which the experiences of diverse communities over thousands of years were distorted and retrofitted to a European Jewish template (and a “lachrymose” one at that), was aligned with decades-long efforts by Israeli state institutions to make those same polyvalent histories monolithic and legible within the Zionist narrative.⁴³⁰ On this front, he had assimilated broad Israeli attitudes about the usability of the Mizrahi past. Yet at the same time, Kahane

⁴²⁸ The association between “Easternness” and effeminacy—including same-sex male romantic and sexual relationships—is the subject of a broad literature, which draws from, builds on, and critiques Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. See, for example, Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998). See ch. 1 for how these beliefs manifested among early Zionists, and their place in the project to create the “new Jew.”

⁴²⁹ Ella Shohat, “Taboo Memories, Diasporic Visions,” in *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices*, 211-12.

⁴³⁰ Ella Shohat has written about the Zionist “pogromization” of Arab-Jewish history. See Shohat, *On the Arab-Jew*. Salo Baron frequently wrote against what he called “the lachrymose conception of Jewish history”; see, for example, Salo W. Baron, “Newer Emphases in Jewish History,” *Jewish Social Studies* 25, no. 4 (October 1963), 240.

diverged from the complementary part of that narrative about the “problem” of Mizrahim and their place in Israeli society, seeing the Ashkenazi hegemony and European culture as the cause of, and not the disciplinary solution to, this perceived social ill. In this sense, Kahane was mimicking the political framework of left-wing Mizrahi activists such as the Black Panthers.⁴³¹ But unlike the Panthers, who sought broad justice and equity across Israel-Palestine, Kahane adopted this credo solely to expand his political constituency while localizing his American-born ideas around race, gender, nationhood, and belonging.⁴³² And while his pivot to the Mizrahi issue came too late to salvage his 1981 election campaign, it would prove decisive in his successful 1984 run for the Knesset.

‘Let’s praise the lord and pass the ammunition’

As Kahane laid the groundwork to take his Israeli movement to the next level, the American JDL—with the exception of the odd summer camp in the Catskills and occasional newsletter—was largely moribund, with persistent infighting and changes of leadership characterizing the organization’s post-Kahane lifecycle. Nonetheless, this did not prevent Kahane from utilizing the network of supporters he had built up back home in order to raise funds for his latest Knesset campaign. Indeed, according to Libby Kahane, the American-Jewish far right was Kahane’s

⁴³¹ Kahane was so convinced of a natural affiliation between his movement and that of the Israeli Black Panthers that he assumed the two groups would form an automatic partnership when he set up his Israeli branch of the JDL—and was deeply disenchanted when the anti-racist Panthers instead began protesting Kahane’s activities and ideology. Violent encounters between the two groups took place, with Kahane eventually declaring the Panthers “enemies of the state”—the same state Kahane was supposedly protesting for its treatment of Mizrahim. Reuven Abergel, “‘Our Ideology is Our Pain’: Notes of an Israeli Black Panther,” *+972 Magazine*, June 26, 2020, <https://www.972mag.com/black-panthers-book-reuven-bergel/>.

⁴³² See Magid, “Meir Kahane.”

primary source of campaign cash, gathered through speaking engagements and other fundraising events.⁴³³ Even though he had relatively few high-profile, substantial donors—although his backers included the Häagen-Dazs founder Reuben Mattus and comedian Jackie Mason—Kahane’s reliance on the American-Jewish community to underwrite his Israeli agenda nonetheless reflected a growing trend of far-right American Jews making tax-exempt donations to support their counterparts in Israel, including over the Green Line.⁴³⁴ The drastic increase in American-Jewish giving to Israeli far-right organizations and political parties in the 1980s, which set off exponential growth in such donations over the coming decades, came hand-in-hand with the continuing ascendance of a deeply neoconservative Jewish constituency that had begun to coalesce in the 1960s and 1970s in response to both domestic and global sociopolitical ructions, as discussed in the previous chapter. Thus, even though far-right and neoconservative American-Jewish voices largely did not join in the far-right Israeli chorus against the Camp David Accords, they nonetheless began asserting their political vision for Israel—and for the role the U.S. could play in supporting that vision—through think tanks, lobby groups, and donations. These avenues for right-wing American Jewish activism took a further leap with the November 1980 election of Ronald Reagan, whose presidency accelerated the neoliberal overhaul of the U.S. economy. As Lila Corwin Berman notes in *The American Jewish Philanthropic Complex*, Jewish federations—which were, and remain, the major recipients and distributors of American-Jewish philanthropy—benefited greatly from the tax reform, welfare cuts, and financial deregulation of the early 1980s.⁴³⁵ Their increased latitude for accumulating and controlling vast sums of private

⁴³³ Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane, Vol. 2*, 453.

⁴³⁴ Robert I. Friedman, “Kahane’s Money Tree,” *Washington Post*, November 8, 1987.

⁴³⁵ Berman, *American Jewish Philanthropic Complex*, 149.

capital, which in turn were attached to the wishes of those making the contributions, signaled the beginning of an exponential boom in politically-motivated American-Jewish philanthropy which would, in due course, have a dramatic impact on the Israeli far-right settler movement. In the meantime, however, the increasing dominance of Reagan-aligned conservative leaders within philanthropic ventures aimed at expanding and deepening Jewish religious and cultural life—which was one of the American-Jewish establishment’s main avenues for asserting its identity and addressing “continuity”—set up an uneasy tension within the American-Jewish community, many of whom were uncomfortable with Reagan’s social agenda and especially his embrace of the Christian right.⁴³⁶ It also advanced the trend of major American-Jewish organizations growing increasingly unrepresentative as they became more and more beholden to the political vision—whether for the U.S. or Israel—of those same major donors.

Moreover, this direction of travel—wherein American-Jewish giving grew in tandem with a burgeoning Republican-Jewish constituency—inspired new waves of political activism and lobbying by right-wing American Jews that targeted both the GOP and the American-Jewish community. The presence of conservative activists at the center of American Jewry was not a novel phenomenon: in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Max Fisher, the president of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, was both “the most prominent leader in American Jewish life and a rising star in Republican circles.”⁴³⁷ (Kahane, in a scathing September 1975 column on representation in the American-Jewish community, called Fisher “the official court

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 151. Despite these misgivings, forty percent of American Jews voted for Reagan in 1980.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

Jew of the community by virtue of his wealth and contributions to the Republican Party.”⁴³⁸ His open loyalty to the GOP, and to then-President Richard Nixon—defending him after both Watergate and the revelation of his antisemitism—apparently failed to undermine Fisher’s standing within a wider Jewish community that did not, for the most part, support the president. This seeming contradiction was smoothed over by Fisher’s insistence that his intercessions with the state on behalf of the Jewish community were apolitical, in what Berman has termed “depoliticized politics.”⁴³⁹ This sleight of hand, which allowed Fisher to present himself as American Jews’ neutral man on the inside, not only contributed to the blurring of lines between the interests of American Jewry and those of the American state, but also facilitated contemporary and later efforts by GOP-supporting American Jews to equally assign themselves as bipartisan interlocutors, despite working to advance the agenda of a party that American Jews overwhelmingly voted against.

Such was the story of the Republican Jewish Coalition (RJC), founded in 1981 and built on the foundation of successful efforts to mobilize Jewish voters for Reagan, as well as Fisher’s ongoing lobbying. The group’s formation represented the efflorescence of the burgeoning Jewish neoconservative stream that had been growing over the past decade or so, bringing together the movement’s stalwart voices—including Fisher and the editors of *Commentary*, which threw its weight behind Reagan in 1980—and younger, more strident political operatives who sought to boost the Republican Party in Jewish life and vice-versa.⁴⁴⁰ (The Republican Party, too, had its

⁴³⁸ Kahane, “In This Bicentennial Year, Jewishness Without Representation Is ...” *Jewish Press*, September 26, 1975, 29, NYPL archives, Jewish Press collection, *ZAN-*P225, vol. 25.

⁴³⁹ Berman, *American Jewish Philanthropic Complex*, 90.

⁴⁴⁰ Balint, *Running Commentary*, 131; Berman, *American-Jewish Philanthropic Complex*, 154-5.

own stakes in this project, seeking to use those same American-Jewish activists as part of its “ethnic” strategy that had begun in the 1970s, wherein it sought to convince ethnic minority groups that the GOP was their natural home.)⁴⁴¹ Many of these new caucus leaders were the same people at the head of the Conference of Presidents and major Jewish philanthropic institutions, further contributing to the shifting balance of political power within the American-Jewish community. The contradictions this brought—between community leaders and state interlocutors who subscribed to one political vision, and their diverse constituents who largely subscribed to a different, more liberal vision—were papered over, as Berman notes, by putting Israel at the center of the group’s mission. In particular, the RJC sought to enshrine a pro-Israel plank in Reagan’s foreign policy platform, a framing that permitted the the caucus and its operatives to, as did Fisher, present themselves as working on behalf of the wider Jewish community—when they were, in fact, actively attempting to “blur the lines between Republican interests and Jewish interests.”⁴⁴²

Yet even as foreign policy became the public focus for Republican-Jewish lobbying groups seeking to influence both the GOP and the wider American-Jewish community, far-right and neoconservative Jewish voices also began adopting the party line on domestic social issues. In this, the American-Jewish far right was signaling its adaptation to the Reagan era, which brought with it a GOP that was increasingly under the sway of the emergent fundamentalist Christian voting bloc, and the culture wars it was stoking. Thus did *Commentary*, for example, run a series of articles in the early 1980s—including by some of its star columnists—attacking

⁴⁴¹ Berman, *American-Jewish Philanthropic Complex*, 155.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 159.

feminism, the LGBTQ community (including proposing homophobic legislation in order to tackle the HIV/AIDS crisis), and affirmative action.⁴⁴³ This positioning by the magazine's editors and contributors, and by their ideological fellow travelers on the American-Jewish far right, marked the beginnings of an awkward tension that would develop into a long-term trend: a consistent acquiescence to, or even embrace of, a Christian right agenda in which repressive domestic social values and brazen antisemitism were either denied, explained away, or tacitly accepted as part of a package deal that privileged a pro-Israel orientation. (Irving Kristol, for example, one of the U.S.'s leading neoconservative ideologues, in 1984 urged *Commentary* readers to embrace the Moral Majority because of its support for Israel.)⁴⁴⁴ Over time, there developed an increasingly common pageant whereby a leading Evangelical pastor—the Moral Majority's Jerry Falwell, for example, or televangelist Pat Robertson—would defend their antisemitic statements by emphasizing their support for Israel, and would largely escape demands for accountability from the American-Jewish far right.⁴⁴⁵

Just as the RJC's framing of Israel as a bipartisan issue helped smooth over its disagreements with the wider Jewish community, so too did this understanding of Israel as a foreign policy priority help grow the Christian right's support among the American-Jewish establishment, beyond the far right. Even as the vast majority of American Jews continued to disapprove of evangelicals' stance on Israel, for example, the ADL—building on its increasingly reflexive tendency to defend the Israeli government, regardless of its domestic civil rights

⁴⁴³ Balint, *Running Commentary*, 138-9.

⁴⁴⁴ Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 235.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 143. Jerry Falwell told an ABC News commentator in 1981 that one “can’t belong to the Moral Majority without being a Zionist.” ABC News, ‘Directions,’ November 1, 1981, cited in Clark, *Allies for Armageddon*, 187.

priorities—tacitly embraced Christian Zionism, with then-head Nathan Perlmutter writing in 1982 that the antisemitism of evangelical eschatology was overshadowed by the need for Israeli security funding. “We need all the friends we have to support Israel,” he declared, suggesting that the alliance could be revisited “[i]f the Messiah comes ... Meanwhile, let’s praise the Lord and pass the ammunition.”⁴⁴⁶

This early 1980s portrait, in which the American-Jewish far right was punching above its weight both in Washington, D.C., and within the wider community, and in which mainstream American-Jewish organizations tolerated, or even welcomed, Christian far-right support, resulted from a series of converging trends. The first trend, which began post-World War II and which accelerated following the Six-Day War, was the migration of Israel to the center of American-Jewish life, and the translation of that process into a Zionist consensus that became the organizing principle of communal identity. It was this trend that allowed far-right groups—Jewish and non-Jewish alike—to advance political projects at times diametrically-opposed to the values of the majority of the American-Jewish community under the banner of ensuring Israel’s survival, and for those groups to consequently find acceptance at the heart of an establishment that was increasingly subordinating its priorities and messaging to those same pro-Israel imperatives. The second trend, as discussed above, was the growing alignment between the American-Jewish establishment’s philanthropic practices and the neoliberal economic model advanced by the Reagan administration, in which an unrepresentative class of largely conservative mega-donors increasingly controlled the capital—and thus priorities—of major

⁴⁴⁶ Nathan Perlmutter and Ruth Ann Perlmutter, *The Real Anti-Semitism in America* (New York, NY: Arbor House, 1982), 156. Cited in Amy Kaplan, “The Old ‘New Anti-Semitism’ and Resurgent White Supremacy,” *Middle East Report* 283 (Summer 2017), accessed May 15, 2021, <https://merip.org/2018/02/the-old-new-anti-semitism-and-resurgent-white-supremacy/>.

American-Jewish organizations, which also fed the proliferation of smaller, but impactful, hawkish pro-Israel groups. This, in turn, facilitated the rapidly growing financial support of private American-Jewish foundations to far-right settlement projects in Israel, which will be explored further below. And the third trend, facilitated by the previous two, involved the American-Jewish far right's integration into a New Right that had won enormous political power through Reagan's election and which, acting on a view of the world shaped by the Cold War, saw Israel as a strategic asset against communism, pan-Arabism, and, increasingly, Islamism. The mobilizing force of these three trends—and how they interacted with and mirrored the growing power of the Israeli far right—would become apparent in a watershed moment for Israeli society and the American-Jewish community, including the far-right factions within them: the 1982 Israel-Lebanon War, and the Sabra and Shatila massacre that formed its gruesome nadir.

‘The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you’

That war was, in part, a consequence of the 1981 Israeli elections. The campaign leading up to the vote, and the electoral results themselves, reflected the acrimony and sociopolitical divisions of the years immediately preceding it: voters overwhelmingly chose their party along ethnic lines, with the vast majority of Ashkenazim voting for Alignment, the Labor-dominated alliance, and most Mizrahim voting for Likud once more. The run-up to the election was characterized by political violence against people and property, particularly at Alignment rallies.⁴⁴⁷ Alignment election materials played up derogatory stereotypes about Mizrahim in anti-Likud flyers; in one, a photograph of a Mizrahi crowd of mostly male Likud supporters is accompanied by the

⁴⁴⁷ Gerald Cromer, *Narratives of Violence*, second edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 69-70.

caption, “This time you must choose between this reality [with an arrow pointing to the photograph] or an enlightened regime.”⁴⁴⁸ Likud’s campaign messages returned fire, invoking the Yom Kippur War (which happened on their rivals’ watch) and appealing directly to Mizrahi supporters. The newly-formed Tehiya emphasized its maximalist bona fides, highlighting the party’s *raison d’être* in campaign imagery that displayed a map of “Greater Israel”—including the soon-to-be-abandoned Sinai.⁴⁴⁹

The Sinai withdrawal was also a factor in Kach’s election campaign, with Rabbi Yisrael Ariel—who had until then been active in the National Religious Party (NRP)—announcing he was joining Kach in the second slot on its election list, behind Kahane. Ariel’s decision to turn his back on the NRP was in large part, he declared, because of its support for the Sinai withdrawal.⁴⁵⁰ Soon after, as in the previous election, the Kach list won the backing of Tzvi Yehuda Kook. Meanwhile, Kahane’s party continued campaigning along familiar lines, distributing flyers promoting Kahane as the natural choice above Likud’s Begin and Alignment’s Shimon Peres, a longtime Labor-Zionist leader. One such document, which featured a table comparing the three men’s policies, pointed to the rabbi’s support for expulsion and for “terror against terror” (i.e. affirming Jewish terrorism as a legitimate response to Palestinian terrorism), and his opposition to equal rights for Palestinians, as favorable points of disagreement with his rivals.⁴⁵¹ Indeed, as far as Kahane’s movement was concerned, there was little to distinguish

⁴⁴⁸ Alignment election campaign flyer, 1981, National Library of Israel, 10th Knesset Campaign Election Materials collection, folder V 2550.

⁴⁴⁹ Tehiya election campaign flyer, 1981. National Library of Israel, 10th Knesset Campaign Election Materials Collection, folder V 2550.

⁴⁵⁰ Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane, Vol. 2*, 295.

⁴⁵¹ Kach election campaign flyer, 1981, Jabotinsky Institute archives, JDL collection, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

between Likud and Alignment: one Kach campaign sticker read that “there is no difference between unclean and profane.”⁴⁵² The party also expanded its populist messaging, focusing on the wealth gap in Israel and proposing a solution entirely in keeping with its overall mandate: stripping state funds from Israel’s Palestinian minority and redirecting them to Jews in need as well as to the military.⁴⁵³ One month out from the election, Kach released an advert touting its plan to table a bill that would criminalize sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews, prompting a *Maariv* journalist to compare the proposal to the Nuremberg Laws. Judge Moshe Etzioni, the chair of the Central Elections Committee, made the same comparison when ruling on whether Kach should be barred from running due to its racist ideology; the motion was defeated when the Likud-dominated committee voted against it.⁴⁵⁴

For all the vitriol poured into the election campaign, the results were far from decisive. Likud, in contrast to its emphatic 1977 victory, eked out a razor-thin win over Alignment; in the end, it was able to form the narrowest governing coalition possible with the inclusion of the NRP, the Haredi Agudat Yisrael, and Tami, a new Mizrahi-oriented party whose leadership, like that of Tehiya, had broken away from the NRP. (Tehiya, which initially refused to sit in coalition with Likud due to the imminent evacuation of the Sinai settlements, would later join the government.) Kach, like most of the other smaller parties that ran in the election, was crowded out by the colossal struggle between Likud and the Alignment; with just over 5,000 votes, Kahane’s party had

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane, Vol. 2*, 298-300.

performed marginally better than in the 1977 election, but still fell drastically short of the numbers needed to win a Knesset seat.

Kahane's hour would come, but in the meantime, the election brought another right-wing figurehead to the highest echelons of the Israeli government, where he would rapidly work to advance the interests of far-right settlers. Ariel Sharon, a former IDF commander whose military track record included overseeing the notorious 1953 Qibya massacre, along with repeated expulsions and reprisal raids against Palestinian civilians, entered the government with the Likud in 1977 as Minister of Agriculture after years of forging ties with Gush Emunim and promoting their cause as an opposition party member. He continued his efforts once Likud was in power, serving as the settlement project's "master builder" to Begin's "architect."⁴⁵⁵ Now, with the evacuation of the Sinai on the horizon, Begin appointed Sharon as defense minister, believing that having someone the settlers saw as one of their own in charge would help prevent the withdrawal from descending into chaos. Accordingly, one of Sharon's first major acts was to oversee the implementation of the Civil Administration, which ostensibly took over civilian tasks from the army in the occupied territories while, in fact, remaining subordinate to the Defense Ministry—a pivotal bureaucratic step that further entrenched and normalized the occupation while retaining its military character.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁵ David Landau, *Arik: The Life of Ariel Sharon* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2014), 155.

⁴⁵⁶ Pedahzur, *Triumph of Israel's Radical Right*, 57; Neve Gordon, *Israel's Occupation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 107. In a sign of the budding ideological network forming between the American-Jewish neoconservative movement and the Israeli far right, Sharon appointed Menahem Milson—an Israeli professor—as the first head of the Civil Administration after reading one of Milson's articles in *Commentary* about the need to push the PLO out of the West Bank. Balint, *Running Commentary*, 172.

Begin had appointed Sharon over and above the warnings of colleagues that the former general would lead the country into war against Lebanon under the pretext of ousting the Palestine Liberation Organization from Beirut, where it had been based since its expulsion from Jordan in the early 1970s. In the end, Begin and his cautioners alike were all correct: the evacuation of Yamit and the other Sinai settlements, despite the dramatic last-ditch actions of the Kach activists and other young settlers, did not produce the bloodshed and national trauma that many had feared, in part because of Sharon's stewardship of the operation. Yet six months later, the defense minister would find himself at the center of a much larger national scandal that mobilized the left- and right-wing both in Israel and overseas. As Begin's advisors had warned, Sharon did indeed drag the nation into the Lebanon quagmire, which officially became a war in early June 1982, mere weeks after Israeli forces had completed the evacuation of the Sinai settlements. Originally presented as a limited military operation against the PLO, within a week of the Israeli army's invasion of southern Lebanon it carried on to the capital and laid siege to vast areas of the city.⁴⁵⁷ The civilian death toll began to climb; by the end of the war, according to contemporary newspaper reports, almost 18,000 Palestinians and Lebanese had been killed.⁴⁵⁸ In response, Israeli public opinion turned against the "operation," and dissenting voices within

⁴⁵⁷ Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2020), 143.

⁴⁵⁸ Jay Ross, "War Casualties Put at 48,000 in Lebanon," *Washington Post*, September 3, 1982.

the army began to speak up.⁴⁵⁹ Anti-war demonstrations occurred in Israeli cities throughout that summer, many led by Peace Now, a liberal NGO that had formed in 1978 in order to advocate for the Camp David Accords.

Yet the most notorious episode in the war occurred once Israel's siege on Beirut had ostensibly been lifted. In mid-September, Israeli army troops stationed outside the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut stood by as militias belonging to the far-right Christian Kataeb (Phalange) party, acting on their mistaken belief that a Palestinian had assassinated Lebanese President Bachir Gemayel days earlier, massacred many hundreds of Palestinian civilians over the course of two days.⁴⁶⁰ In addition to failing to intervene, despite knowledge of the slaughter taking place, Israeli soldiers also blocked the exits to the camp and shot flares at night, lighting up the darkened alleyways of the camp as the massacre continued.⁴⁶¹

There was uproar in Israel at the news. Within a week of the mass killings, the government announced the formation of the Kahan Commission to investigate Israeli responsibility for the massacre, and Peace Now organized a 400,000-strong Now rally took place

⁴⁵⁹ Some of the most prominent Israeli-Jewish criticisms and analyses of the war include Jacobo Timerman, *The Longest War* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1982); Dov Yermiya, *My War Diary: Israel in Lebanon* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 1984); and Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1985). Timerman, who moved to Israel after being imprisoned and tortured by the Argentine junta, wrote that the war had "made the Jewish people lose their moral tradition, their proper place in history"; Yermiya, a retired Israeli military commander who had fought in the 1948 war and volunteered to serve in Lebanon, wrote of his "shame" at being part of a nation that "sings at the edge of destruction"; Schiff and Ya'ari, both veteran military correspondents, chose to preface their book with a line from the book of the prophet Habakkuk: "The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you."

⁴⁶⁰ The number of victims is in dispute, ranging from 460, according to the Lebanese army, to more than 3,000, as estimated by the Israeli journalist Amnon Kapeliouk shortly after the massacre.

⁴⁶¹ Rashid Khalidi, who was in Beirut during the massacre, describes sheltering in an American University of Beirut faculty apartment on the first night and witnessing "a surreal scene: Israeli flares floating down in the darkness in complete silence, one after another, over the southern reaches of Beirut, for what seemed like an eternity." Khalidi, *Hundred Years' War*, 158.

in Tel Aviv. (Kach, by contrast, published a “manifesto” a month after the massacre calling it “divine retribution” for the massacres in Palestine of 1929 and 1936.)⁴⁶² The Israeli army began to withdraw from Beirut at the end of September; although the PLO had been driven out of Lebanon back in June, the war—with all the opposition in Israel, the unflattering headlines overseas, and a hazy narrative as to what it had actually been for, lacking the ostensibly existential character of Israel’s earlier conflicts—registered as a defeat. And in February 1983, the Israeli government commission investigating the Sabra and Shatila massacre released its findings, which laid “personal responsibility” for the most egregious aspect of this failed military adventure at the feet of one man: Defense Minister Ariel Sharon. Secret annexes to the report, uncovered by historian Seth Anziska in 2012, were even more damning: Sharon had, according to meeting minutes taken in 1982, been in discussions to “clean” Beirut of Palestinians, including by way of sending Kataeb militias into the refugee camps.⁴⁶³

Israel’s disastrous exploits in Lebanon, and the mass mobilization of the left that accompanied them, had a profound impact on a far-right movement that was still reeling from its failure to prevent the evacuation of the Sinai. Ehud Sprinzak later told the American reporter Robert Friedman—whose beat during the same period covered the transnational Jewish far right—that the shame of the war’s perceived failings, and the inflammatory political rhetoric that had accompanied it, accelerated anti-Palestinian racism in Israeli society while leading the far right to increasingly portray the Israeli left as a treasonous fifth column. Given that Israel labeled the war as a mission to destroy the PLO, Sprinzak explained, “all those who opposed it were

⁴⁶² Kotler, *Heil Kahane*, 103; Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane, Vol. 2*, 366.

⁴⁶³ Seth Anziska, “Sabra and Shatila: New Revelations,” *New York Review of Books*, September 17, 2018, <https://www.nybooks-com.proxy01.its.virginia.edu/daily/2018/09/17/sabra-and-shatila-new-revelations/>.

immediately ... denounced as pro-PLO traitors.”⁴⁶⁴ As part of this heightened state of internal political tension, Sprinzak continued, the dehumanizing racist comments once mostly associated with Kahane and his movement became more common on the “mainstream” right; Friedman cites then-IDF Chief of Staff Rafael Eitan’s reference to West Bank Palestinians as “drugged cockroaches in a bottle,” and Begin’s labeling of PLO members as “two-legged beasts,” as examples of this trend.⁴⁶⁵

The ratcheting up of intra-Jewish political violence, which built on the 1981 election campaign, took a drastic turn following the release of the Kahan Commission report: at a Peace Now rally held two days later, an Israeli right-winger threw a grenade into a crowd that killed Emil Grunzweig, a 35-year-old peace activist.⁴⁶⁶ The Commission’s critical findings, and its singling out of a right-wing hero in Sharon, served to further entrench Israel’s hawkish far right in their views, leading them to reject the Kahan report despite its having been ordered by a far-right government. Indeed, in research conducted a few years after the war by Benny Temkin, an Israeli academic and then-member of the left-wing Ratz party, hawkish Israelis were more likely to believe that they would accept the Commission’s findings due to the political identity of the current government. Instead, however, the “incongruent new information” they were presented

⁴⁶⁴ Friedman, *False Prophet*, 210. Eitan would go on to join Tehiya in 1984, after wrapping up his military career. While he was still serving as IDF Chief of Staff, Eitan helped militarize the far-right settler movement, providing them with arms and organizing them into units to act as settlement security. Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord*, 66.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 210-11.

⁴⁶⁶ Kahane was questioned in connection with the attack, before the arrest of Yona Avrushmi, who went on to serve 27 years in jail for the murder. “Thousands Attend Israeli’s Funeral,” *New York Times*, February 12, 1983. In response to the attack, a Kach press release announced that the party would “mold” Mizrahim “into a political tool that will shift from support for Begin to Meir Kahane.” Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane, Vol. 2*, 391. Although Avrushmi, a Mizrahi Jew, would not be arrested until the following year, opposition to Peace Now was largely believed to come from Mizrahim.

with led them to distort or dismiss it, or even to change their views about the authority (the government) that instigated the Commission.⁴⁶⁷ On this front, those individuals interviewed by Temkin exhibited the same cognitive dissonance as the religious far-right settlers Motti Inbari studied, whose reaction to “incongruent new information” (in their case, “prophetic failure,”) also led to rejection of that information and renewed efforts to implement their political vision.⁴⁶⁸ This, in turn, set the stage for an acceleration of far-right activity, violence, and political gains throughout the mid-1980s.

As in the mid-to-late 1970s, then, a series of crises—including some that were a realization of earlier fears, such as the Sinai evacuation—helped deliver the Israeli far right into its next evolutionary phase. In terms of political power, Kahane would be the most obvious beneficiary of the morass that Israel had entered following the Lebanon War, as well as of the fact that it had happened on Begin’s watch. And as Kahane’s incitement against Palestinians and the Israeli left began to attract him wider support in post-1982 Israel, so too did the American-Jewish far right—with significant overlaps with the mainstream establishment—react to the Lebanon fiasco by promoting subtler, if no less enthusiastic, anti-Palestinian attitudes and initiatives.

Like father, like son

Right as the war in Lebanon was commencing, a new deputy chief of mission took up his post at the Israeli embassy in Washington. Benjamin Netanyahu, the son of the leading Revisionist

⁴⁶⁷ Benny Temkin, “Attitude Change, Dogmatism, and Ascription of Responsibility: The Case of the State Commission of Inquiry on the Massacres at Sabra and Shatila,” *Political Psychology* 8, no. 1 (1987), 27.

⁴⁶⁸ Inbari, *Religious Messianic Zionism*, 5.

Zionist and historian Benzion Netanyahu, and the founder of an anti-terrorism research institute in Israel, had been appointed to the post by then-Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. and one-time Betar leader Moshe Arens. With an ex-movie-star president now leading the U.S., Arens believed that “public-relations expertise” was the most important skill his deputy could bring to the job—especially as the Reagan administration seeming to be weighing up taking action against Israel over its Lebanon invasion.⁴⁶⁹ Arens accordingly saw the younger Netanyahu, who had attended high school and college in the U.S. and who had had the opportunity to glad-hand friendly, mostly Republican politicians a few years prior at his institute’s inaugural counter-terrorism conference, as an ideal fit. With some American commentators referring to Lebanon as “Israel’s Vietnam,” implicitly characterizing it as a ruinous misadventure inflicted on an undeserving population, the man who had been “brought up never to believe Arabs” was now tasked with trying to impress a similar mindset upon the U.S. media, running a publicity campaign that treated attack as the best form of defense.⁴⁷⁰ And although Netanyahu was unable to entirely deflect and redirect the political backlash and critical reporting about Israel that emerged throughout the war, particularly in the wake of the Sabra and Shatila massacre, he nonetheless quickly made a name for himself in the embassy at a time when Israel’s international image was perhaps at its lowest point so far. Even as reports of Israeli shelling in Beirut sparked outcry, then, Netanyahu’s propaganda machine at the embassy parried charges of wanton destruction and disregard for non-combatants, while transferring exclusive blame for the plight of Lebanese civilians onto the PLO. The embassy’s messaging was complemented by American-Jewish

⁴⁶⁹ Pfeffer, *Bibi*, 142.

⁴⁷⁰ Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 137; Ben Caspit, *The Netanyahu Years* (New York, NY: Thomas Dunne Books, 2017), 59.

establishment organizations, which—faced with unprecedented criticism of Israel from within and without the community—“closed ranks” with U.S.-based Likud supporters, moving not only to make a mark in the nation’s editorial pages, but also to discredit the reporting of journalists on the ground.⁴⁷¹

Yet Netanyahu’s presence and impact in Washington represented more than just an Israeli public figure parachuting in during a turbulent moment in the American discourse on Israel. As his biographer Ben Caspit notes, Netanyahu “spoke like a neocon, thought like a neocon, and argued like a neocon.”⁴⁷² As we have seen, the election of Reagan brought neoconservatism to new heights in the U.S., and the onset of the Israel-Lebanon War further mobilized the movement’s American-Jewish adherents. As did Netanyahu, neoconservative commentators assessed the conflict in Lebanon as an existential battle between the forces of “good” (the West) and “evil” (Islam, the Arab world), in which Israel was the Western world’s last line of defense against fundamentalist terrorism—and was being maligned for simply doing what needed to be done. Over at *Commentary*, more than ever the unofficial organ of the American-Jewish neoconservative movement, Norman Podhoretz—in an article titled “J’accuse,” written just before the Sabra and Shatila massacre—defended the war and lamented the criticism that had been heaped upon Israel for its actions in Beirut, while arguing for “recogni[tion] that the vilification of Israel is the phenomenon to be addressed, and not the Israeli behavior that supposedly provoked it.”⁴⁷³ In the first issue of *Commentary* published after the release of the

⁴⁷¹ Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 153.

⁴⁷² Caspit, *The Netanyahu Years*, 61. Netanyahu was also fluent in Reaganomics, having been a disciple of Ayn Rand since adolescence. Pfeffer, *Bibi*, 67.

⁴⁷³ Norman Podhoretz, “J’Accuse,” *Commentary* 74, no. 3 (September 1, 1982), <https://www.commentary.org/articles/norman-podhoretz/jaccuse/>.

Kahan Commission report, the Canadian Jewish studies scholar Ruth Wisse, reviewing the Argentinian-Israeli journalist Jacobo Timerman’s anti-war memoir, also defended Israel’s actions in Lebanon while omitting any mention of Sabra and Shatila, and compared Timerman to Kahane, citing his “share[d]...contempt for Israeli democracy.”⁴⁷⁴

In Washington, meanwhile, Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA) newsletters published during and following the war stated that the Israeli army had done “the dirty work...for the Western world at large by dealing a serious blow to Palestinian and other international terrorism,” and featured extensive analyses downplaying the number of Lebanese and Palestinian civilian casualties.⁴⁷⁵ And new Washington-based watchdog organizations—which, while not formally identified with neoconservatism, nonetheless espoused similar attitudes regarding Israel’s role in “defending the West” against the Arab and Muslim world—formed to monitor and critique what they saw as anti-Israel mainstream media reporting on the conflict, joining the chorus that sought to cast doubt on journalists’ accounts of the Lebanon War. Among the most notable of these was the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA), whose founder, teacher Winifred Meiselman, established the organization in direct response to the *Washington Post*’s reporting on the conflict.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁴ Ruth Wisse, “Bearing False Witness,” *Commentary* 75, no. 3 (March 1, 1983), <https://www.commentary.org/articles/ruth-wisse/the-longest-war-israel-in-lebanon-by-jacobo-timerman/>.

⁴⁷⁵ JINSA, “Editorials: Israel Did the Dirty Work,” *Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs Newsletter* 3, no. 13, June-July 1982, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210211064450/https://jinsa.org/files/newsletter-archive/1982/jun-jul1982.pdf>; Saul I. Stern, “Message from the President,” *Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs Newsletter* 3, no. 16, November 1982, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210211064450/https://jinsa.org/files/newsletter-archive/1982/nov1982.pdf>.

⁴⁷⁶ CAMERA, “A Brief History of CAMERA,” accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.camera.org/about/history/>. Meiselman’s tenure as CAMERA head, which lasted until 1991, included a co-authored paper on Soviet disinformation and a public spat with Edward Said, conducted in the pages of the *New York Times*. Later, she became the president of a non-profit tasked with preserving the former home and legacy of Laura Ratcliffe, a Confederate spy. Friends of Laura Ratcliffe, Form 990-EZ, 2009.

The proliferation of right-wing talking points that served to prop up Israeli *hasbara*—and the appearance of organizations founded to disseminate them—was complemented, as we have seen, by more mainstream American-Jewish groups adopting a similar defensive posture regarding Israel’s actions in Lebanon. Yet the American-Jewish far right and mainstream’s growing alignment on Israel manifested beyond the discourse on the Lebanon War—a trend embodied in the figure of Netanyahu, whose appeal stretched far beyond the halls of neoconservative publications and think tanks. He encapsulated the American-Jewish ideal of the all-Israeli man—born in Tel Aviv, romantically thought of as “the first Hebrew city”; a former member of an Israeli army special forces unit; bereaved brother of an Israeli military officer killed during a raid to rescue Jewish hostages captured by Palestinians—yet wrapped up in American-adjacent packaging, with almost accentless English to boot. This combination saw Netanyahu make quick work of winning over American-Jewish organizations, while becoming a star among pro-Israel mega-donors—the very same men whose donor-advised funds were rapidly reordering the space of American-Jewish philanthropy.⁴⁷⁷ (Netanyahu’s popularity among his colleagues was less assured, however: one of the embassy’s secretaries, hearing him boast in 1982 that he would one day become prime minister of Israel, replied: “I’ll commit suicide if that happens.”⁴⁷⁸ Two years later, Israeli Foreign Ministry staff around the world went on strike to protest poor pay and hazardous working conditions; Netanyahu crossed the picket line, and the diplomatic workers’ committee considered sanctioning him as a result.)⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁷⁸ Caspit, *The Netanyahu Years*, 59.

⁴⁷⁹ Gil Sedan, “Foreign Ministry Staff on Strike,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, June 12, 1984.

Indeed, part of Netanyahu's great success and impact during his stint as the second-in-command at the Israeli embassy, and then as ambassador to the UN from 1984-5, was his consistent framing of issues relating to Israel through the lens of terrorism and national security, striking notes that were legible to both the neoconservative political elite and the American-Jewish establishment.⁴⁸⁰ This rhetoric served two purposes for Netanyahu: on the political level, it gave him a foundation for positioning Israel as a natural Western ally in combating international terrorism; and on the personal level, the discussion of Jewish safety (and, where appropriate, international inertia) gave Netanyahu a platform from which invoke historical precedents of Jewish persecution, and thus to claim that he was speaking in the name of all Jews across time and space—a preview of the populist rhetoric that would characterize his tenure as Israeli prime minister. Thus, for example, did he tell the audience at a Washington pro-Israel fundraising dinner in 1983 that “we say to the enemies of the Jewish people ... for 2,000 years our people fought ... our would-be oppressors and we shall not be cowed by you”; and in November 1984, shortly after beginning his stint as Israel's ambassador to the UN, he assessed that terror attacks on U.S. targets in Beirut had given U.S. policymakers a new appreciation of Israel's security situation, such that between “Soviet-backed radicals and...Moslem [sic] fundamentalists...America found its alliance with Israel the only real point of stability and strength.”⁴⁸¹ A week later, Netanyahu told a Jordanian diplomat who had made crude remarks comparing Nazis and Israel's military regime in the West Bank that he spoke on behalf of the six

⁴⁸⁰ Arens lobbied then-Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to appoint Netanyahu to the UN ambassador post.

⁴⁸¹ Kevin Freeman, “Netanyahu Says U.S.-Israeli Accords Will Not Result in Israel Acting as a ‘Sword For Hire,’” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, December 7, 1983; Murray Zuckoff, “Israeli Envoy Says War in Lebanon, Arab Terrorism Against the U.S. in Beirut Have ‘Fundamentally Altered’ Israel's International Position,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, November 20, 1984.

million Jews killed during the Holocaust, before asking, “Have you no decency, sir?”—invoking a phrase launched at Senator Joe McCarthy during Senate hearings on his communist witch hunt.⁴⁸² And the following month, in his first interview as UN ambassador, Netanyahu told the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* that “terrorism ... is an international problem and ... [a]ll the Western nations should adopt measures against terrorism and fight in unison against it,” foreshadowing the neoconservative “clash of civilizations” framework that would come to prominence the following decade after the end of the Cold War.⁴⁸³ Netanyahu, like the American-Jewish neoconservative movement he was simulating, was already looking ahead to a time when the Arab, and especially Muslim, world would replace the Soviet Union and its communist proxies as the chief ideological foe of the putative “West,” and positioning Israel as both the prime victim of—and answer to—that evolving threat. For Israel, the spate of attacks in Beirut represented “a time of great opportunities,” Netanyahu claimed, offering the Jewish state more “tremendous possibilities” than at any other moment in its existence.⁴⁸⁴

Seen against the backdrop of the 1980s’ shifting geopolitics, it is perhaps no coincidence that Netanyahu’s political career was beginning just as Kahane’s was about to reach its zenith with his election to the Knesset. In the most basic sense, this was partly due to the different generations of the Jewish far right the men belonged to: although they were only born seventeen years apart, Kahane, with his early Betar membership and childhood memories of Jabotinsky,

⁴⁸² Yitzhak Rabi, “Israel Envoy to Jordanian: ‘Have You No Decency, Sir?’” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, November 28, 1984.

⁴⁸³ Yitzhak Rabi, “Special Interview, Netanyahu: A Forceful, Articulate Defender of Israel in the UN,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, December 14, 1984.

⁴⁸⁴ Zuckoff, “Israeli Envoy Says War in Lebanon.”

was of the old guard, while Netanyahu—with his Revisionist Zionist father and eventual leadership of the political party that emerged from Jabotinsky’s movement—was among that generation’s successors. Yet the differences between them, and the timing and trajectory of their political ascendance, also represented more than just accidents of time and place of birth: they were emblematic of the past and future of a transnational Jewish far right that was evolving in response to wider changes in far-right movements across the globe. Kahanism, with its resemblance to fascism, was part of an old mode of ultranationalist, racist, and totalitarian politics that won popularity among a significant minority of whichever society it was part of (whether the U.S. or Israel), but had little-to-no chance of winning an electoral majority; as historian Federico Finchelstein has noted, fascism simply became untenable following World War II⁴⁸⁵, leading to the emergence of populism as a (supposedly) democratic, alternative form of mass politics.⁴⁸⁵ Netanyahu, by contrast, represented the advent of that transition for the transnational Jewish far right—and, as will be explored in the next chapter, would amass unprecedented political power in Israel as a result. This metamorphosis is neatly captured in aesthetic terms: citing the scholar of Japanese fascism Reto Hoffman, Finchelstein points out that fascist movements in the first half of the twentieth century adopted a “rainbow” of uniforms—brown shirts in Italy, black shirts in Germany, blue shirts in China, orange shirts in South Africa, to name but a few (and to which I would add Kach’s yellow shirts), each “national adaptations of what was clearly a global ideology.”⁴⁸⁶ Populism, by contrast, had no uniform (or rather, I would

⁴⁸⁵ Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism*, 65.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

argue, had a uniform that more clearly blended into the sociopolitical milieu of the new populist leaders—a sober suit, shirt, and tie).⁴⁸⁷

As far as the transnational Jewish far right was concerned, then, the Kahane uniform would in time give way to the relative monochrome of Netanyahu's (and his peers') business suits—a transition emblematic not only of the broader shift from fascism to populism, but also, consequently, of the wider appeal available to Netanyahu than to Kahane, even before the former's evolution into a populist leader had taken place. If Kahane represented the rough, cacophonous, extreme strand of the transnational Jewish far right, whose base of support came largely—although by no means exclusively—from those on the socioeconomic margins, Netanyahu represented its well-heeled, establishment-friendly stream, with an open-door invitation to the conferences and dinners of the political and communal elite that identified as much with his ideas on national security as those on the economy. Where Kahane's Jewish transnationalism was dogged by the same contradiction that had been there from the start—how to rationalize a movement that relied on the diaspora while at the same time trying to negate that diaspora, driven by the logic of bounded nation-states—Netanyahu's was fully compatible with an increasingly globalized world, in which neoliberalism was beginning to undermine existing ideas about national borders (at least as far as capital and its bearers were concerned). And while, in keeping with the historical progression outlined by Finchelstein, Netanyahu had some views that, when taken to their logical conclusion, were not a world away from Kahane's—he told the journalist Max Hastings at a Jerusalem dinner in the late 1970s that “[in] the next war, if we do it right we'll have a chance to get all the Arabs out. We can clear the West Bank, sort out

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

Jerusalem”—he refrained from making such overtly expulsionist comments in public.⁴⁸⁸ This relative restraint was partly what helped Netanyahu to win widespread American-Jewish establishment approval, where Kahane had failed.

As Netanyahu assiduously worked Washington, then, his ascendance still in its infancy, he was building a U.S. political career that he would, like Kahane before him, use as a springboard to try and enter the Knesset upon his return to Israel later in the decade. With the 1984 elections in Israel approaching, Netanyahu’s time in Jerusalem was yet to come. But with the country still reeling from the fallout of the Lebanon War, Kahane’s moment had arrived.

Kahane to the Knesset

In August 1983, in the wake of the Lebanon scandal and the death the previous year of his wife, Aliza, Begin stepped down as Israeli prime minister, with fellow former Irgunist Yitzhak Shamir stepping in to take his place. The move hastened the country’s path to early elections in July 1984, helped along by the destabilization caused by the Lebanon War and by a spiraling economy, whose free fall following the Yom Kippur War was greatly exacerbated by years of Begin’s free market policies. Amidst this turmoil, the far right’s disillusionment with Begin’s tenure—from the Camp David Accords to the Sinai withdrawal and the ignominy of the events in Beirut—further shook up the political map during the 1983/4 election campaign. Kahane, for

⁴⁸⁸ Max Hastings, *Going to the Wars* (London, UK: MacMillan, 2000), 259. During the same dinner, Netanyahu also described the members of the Israeli army’s Golani infantry brigade, whose troops were mostly Mizrahi, as “okay as long as they’re led by white officers.” Like Kahane, Netanyahu would come to rely heavily on a Mizrahi base of support for electoral victory; unlike the rabbi, however, he made little effort to disguise his contempt for this constituency, even as he courted their vote during electoral campaigns from the 1990s onwards. See Orly Noy, “How Likud’s Ashkenazi elite became the patron saints of the Mizrahim,” *+972 Magazine*, August 3, 2020, <https://www.972mag.com/likud-ashkenazi-elite-mizrahim-netanyahu/>.

several reasons, was poised to take advantage of the situation: he appealed to parts of the Likud base who lost interest in the party when Begin left; his national profile had risen as a result of his followers' actions during the Yamit evacuation; and he had an established track record of loudly speaking out about some of the very issues that were gripping the Israeli right in the wake of the summer of 1982.⁴⁸⁹ In particular, Kahane's repeated diatribes about the treason of left-wingers, and his casting of Palestinians as an enemy that must be either removed or destroyed, were less fringe sentiments than they had been last time he ran for office. The rabbi's dedication to nurturing and mobilizing his Mizrahi constituency also took on a new tenor in the wake of the left-right animosity accelerated by the Lebanon conflict. Some prominent Mizrahi coalitions had supported the Peace Now demonstrations in 1982, but the intraethnic political divide that had been gathering pace since 1977 became even further entrenched, and Kahane seized on it in order to try and expand his base.⁴⁹⁰

In this atmosphere, news of Jewish terrorist attacks and the discovery of a high-profile settler terrorist network not only failed to dent Kahane's support, but in the latter instance may even have boosted it. In March 1984, two JDL- and Kach-affiliated American Jews—Chicago native Matt Liebowitz, and New York-born Craig Leitner—machine-gunned a Palestinian bus traveling between Jerusalem and Ramallah, wounding nine of its passengers. Liebowitz, who went on to serve twenty-six months in jail for the attack, was one of dozens of JDL members wanted in the U.S. in connection with bombings of Russian and Arab targets, and who had

⁴⁸⁹ Friedman, *False Prophet*, 213.

⁴⁹⁰ On Mizrahi anti-war activism in 1982, see Giladi, *Discord in Zion*. Giladi notes that Mizrahim, along with Palestinians, were among those most affected by both the Lebanon War and the withdrawal from the Sinai—funding both the conflict and compensation for settlers uprooted from Egypt necessitated cutbacks to crucial social welfare, upon which both groups were disproportionately reliant due to discrimination and state neglect. Giladi, *Discord in Zion*, 241.

arrived in Israel in late 1983 in an effort to evade the American authorities.⁴⁹¹ Kahane, according to Liebowitz, had personally given him \$600 without asking questions about how the money would be used, well aware that an attack was in the offing; at a press conference following the shooting, Kahane called Liebowitz and Leitner “good Jewish boys,” and declared the shooting “sanctified by God.”⁴⁹²

The following month, Israeli intelligence agents arrested the leaders of the Jewish Underground, who had conducted a string of high-profile terror attacks against Palestinians over the past few years. The discovery of the group and its activities caused an outcry among many Israeli politicians and commentators, as well as a degree of soul-searching among sections of the religious-Zionist settler movement—much of which played out in the pages of the settler organ *Nekuda*.⁴⁹³ Yet the Jewish Underground also enjoyed considerable transnational support, with

⁴⁹¹ Robert I. Friedman, “Kahane’s Commandos,” *Alicia Patterson Foundation*, 1987, accessed May 18, 2021, <https://aliciapatterson.org/stories/kahanes-commandos>. Beyond the identity of the perpetrators, the attack had a further transatlantic dimension: Leitner had arranged with Rafi Medoff, a JDL officer back in New York, for the latter to contact the Israeli media to alert them to the attack once he received a collect call from a “Mr. Gray.” The same month the shooting took place, a former leading intelligence officer in the Israeli police, Sammy Nachmias, registered his lack of surprise at American-Jewish involvement in terror attacks against Palestinians; citing specifically attacks on mosques, Nachmias insisted that such assaults were evidence of “an American-Jewish mentality.” His comments were made a few weeks before the arrest of the predominantly Israeli-born members of the Jewish Underground. “Piguim: Nachmias Nichesh Sh’Y’atzru Americanim” [“Terror Attacks: Nachmias Guessed Americans Would Be Arrested”], *Koteret Rashit*, March 7, 1984, 8.

⁴⁹² Friedman, *Kahane’s Commandos*. Following the completion of his sentence, Liebowitz moved back to the US and began working with a Gush Emunim-affiliated organization based in New York that worked to encourage aliyah. Gush Emunim was, at the time, sponsoring “pilot trips” to Israel for American Jews, hoping to entice them to move to the occupied West Bank; one such trip in 1985 was attended by Marc Zell, who had been a JINSA board member until the previous year. He and his family emigrated to Israel in 1988; Zell later joined the Likud central committee and campaigned for Netanyahu in the 1996 election. He is currently (May 2021) the co-chair of Republicans Overseas Israel. Sarah-Rivka Emstoff, “The Guardians of Israel,” *Jewish Homemaker*, November-December 1996, accessed May 19, 2021, https://web.archive.org/web/20030518060548fw_/http://homemaker.org/kislev_57/cover.html.

⁴⁹³ See, for example, the critical editorial in *Nekuda* 73, May 25, 1984; and a further editorial in *Nekuda* 74, June 21, 1984, entitled “In Support of the Arrestees and Their Families,” praising efforts to provide material support to the members of the Underground and their spouses. Such support also originated in the U.S., with Robert Jacobs, a New York-based real estate developer and longtime donor to Kahane, who raised over \$100,000 for the families. Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 149.

calls for their early release heard both in Israel and the U.S. from the moment of their conviction. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis either petitioned or protested for clemency and preferential treatment, and dozens of American supporters, including rabbis—some citing the widespread support of Israelis—sent letters to then-President Chaim Herzog pleading for the same.⁴⁹⁴ The group also received high-profile American visitors in jail, among them Alan Dershowitz, who told the men they had suffered a trial by media, meaning that their actual trial had been unfair.⁴⁹⁵ Kahane added his voice to the chorus, exploiting—in the later assessment of Jewish Underground member Haggai Segal—the outpouring of support for the group in the wake of their arrest in order to boost his election campaign.⁴⁹⁶ And his doing so appeared to have some impact: Kach’s level of support in Kiryat Arba, the far-right settlement adjacent to Hebron which was popular with far-right American Jews who had immigrated to Israel, increased significantly from 1981 to 1984. According to Shalom Wach, the then-head of the settlement’s local council who spoke with journalist Yair Kotler after the election, much of Kach’s vote-share was attributable to a protest vote—and in particular a form of dissent against Tehiya, one of Kach’s main rivals among the settler far right. Just before the national election, Wach recalled, Tehiya head Geulah Cohen visited Kiryat Arba and criticized the Jewish Underground, turning voters on

⁴⁹⁴ See, for example, Telegram from Sidney Bernstein, President of the Coral Springs, FL, Democratic Club, to President Chaim Herzog, May 16, 1984; Letter from Los Angeles-based rabbis to Chaim Herzog, undated; Letter from Samuel Kaplan, President of B’nai B’rith New Jersey, to President Chaim Herzog, October 1, 1984; The Committee for Clemency for the ‘Underground,’ “Clemency for ‘The Underground,” advertisement in *Maariv*, October 3, 1986, 24. Repeated presidential pardons saw every imprisoned member of the Jewish Underground set free within a few years of their conviction; several went on to high-profile and prestigious careers in journalism and politics.

⁴⁹⁵ Haggai Segal, *Dear Brothers: The West Bank Jewish Underground* (Woodmere, NY: Beit Shammai Publications, 1988), 261. Dershowitz had previously succeeded in getting charges against a group of JDL activists, who had been linked with the murder of Iris Kones in the 1972 bombing of Russian-American impresario Sol Hurok’s office, dropped. Kotler, *Heil Kahane*, 69.

⁴⁹⁶ Kotler, *Heil Kahane*, 106; Segal, *Dear Brothers*, 230. The group’s assessment of Kahane’s “cheap use” of their trial meant he received a chilly reception when he went to visit them in jail, according to Segal.

to Kahane.⁴⁹⁷ This, in turn, presaged Kach's strong showing in the local council election in Kiryat Arba the following year.⁴⁹⁸

In terms of resources, Kahane was being handsomely supported—as usual—by his American followers, to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. According to estranged contacts of the rabbi, the donors were unaware that their funds were being put toward Kach's election campaigns; rather, they apparently believed their money was earmarked for JDL activities in the U.S.⁴⁹⁹ This seems implausible, however—Kahane was open about the purposes of his frequent visits when he returned to the U.S. for speaking tours, and he created materials to distribute expressly for campaign fundraising. One such leaflet, created before Begin had resigned in 1983 but which anticipated early elections, asked supporters to set up local fundraising committees for Kach's upcoming campaign, titled “Operation Neighborhood Time Bomb”—Kahane's nod to Mizrahi-Ashkenazi tensions and his pitch for being the only person able to defuse them.⁵⁰⁰ Yet despite centering this very domestic Israeli issue, the rabbi also continued stressing the transnational dimension of his movement, claiming that victory in the elections would give him “the kind of respectability which would open doors in Israel and the United States which hitherto

⁴⁹⁷ Kotler, *Heil Kahane*, 107. Notably, Cohen's parliamentary aide—the New York-born Yisrael Medad, who had joined Betar as a teenager before emigrating to Israel in 1970—had, ahead of the Sinai withdrawal, written in *Nekuda* that it could only be prevented by Israel taking over the Temple Mount. Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 128.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Kotler, *Heil Kahane*, 72-3.

⁵⁰⁰ Kach Movement, “Kahane for Knesset: Operation Neighborhood Time Bomb,” Undated, prob. 1983, Jabotinsky Institute archives, JDL collection, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

have been closed,” and that it would give him and his organizations, “both in Israel and the United States, representation in the Jewish Agency and all the umbrella groups in America.”⁵⁰¹

Finally, Kahane’s road to the Knesset received a further boost when Israel’s Supreme Court overturned a decision by the Central Election Commission to ban Kach from running, on the grounds of racism. In their ruling, the court’s justices wrote that no law existed under which a party could be kept out of the elections, a decision that provoked outrage among Israel’s more liberal politicians and commentators. In an especially pointed response, reporter Igal Sarna—a founding member of Peace Now—told his readers shortly after Kahane’s election to the Knesset to remember the date June 28, 1984, because that was the day that “five judges erred...and let the genie out of the bottle”; in the same article, Former Supreme Court Justice Haim Cohn, who fled Nazi Germany for Palestine in 1933, told Sarna the judges had made the correct decision. “The comparison [of Kahane] to the Nazis is accurate only with regard to Kahane’s teachings,” Cohn said, “not his chances of taking over. I assign him no importance, one should be as scared of him as of hell, but it’s only a marginal phenomenon.”⁵⁰²

The election, held on July 23, 1984, ended with a unity government as Alignment and Likud were almost tied once more, each unable to form a coalition. Kach received just under 26,000 votes, a share of 1.2 percent and a roughly fivefold increase from the party’s 1981 showing. This

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Igal Sarna, “HaShed BaBakbuk” [“The Genie in the Bottle”], *Hadashot*, July 29, 1984. The article is accompanied by an illustration portraying a semi-incorporeal Kahane soaring out of a bottle over the heads of several of his dancing supporters, all identical in beards, kippot, and Kach t-shirts. In the same ruling, the Supreme Court also overturned the Central Election Committee’s ban on the Progressive List for Peace, a joint Palestinian-Jewish left-wing party. They would go on to win two seats in the 1984 election.



Fig. 4.2: Mira Friedman, Caricature of Meir Kahane, *Hadashot*, July 29, 1984.

was sufficient to send Kahane to the Knesset as Kach's sole representative; among those on the Kach list who missed out were Yehuda Richter in the second slot, who had led the bunker protest in Yamit, and Baruch Goldstein in the third slot, who had also been at Yamit and whose sister, Bat-Sheva, had been in the bunker with Richter.⁵⁰³ Data published following the election showed that Kahane's outreach among disaffected Mizrahi voters had done the trick: Israeli Jews of Middle Eastern and North African origin voted for Kach in almost double the numbers of the general population, with 2.5 percent casting their ballot for Kahane's party.⁵⁰⁴ Nonetheless, the American connection remained prevalent within the party itself: during and after the campaign Kahane was surrounded by a close coterie of American-born aides, including Goldstein, who was also acting as his campaign manager, and his parliamentary secretary and Kach spokesperson, Baruch Marzel, who as a baby moved to Israel with his family from Boston.⁵⁰⁵ And the movement's outreach to American supporters continued: a few months after the elections, Kahane established Kach International, which billed itself as "the Diaspora Wing of the Israeli Kach movement."⁵⁰⁶ This gesture, which at its heart formed simply another fundraising avenue for Kahane, nonetheless encapsulated the deeply enmeshed, tangled nature of the transnational

⁵⁰³ Kach list for the 11th Israeli national elections, 1984, National Library of Israel, Elections collection, "1984 - Elections to the 11th Knesset - additional information," accessed April 12, 2022, https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nli/hebrew/collections/treasures/elections/all_elections/pages/1984-data.aspx.

⁵⁰⁴ Hanoach and Rafi Smith, "Disgruntled Sephardim Put Kahane in Knesset," *Jerusalem Post*, July 27, 1984.

⁵⁰⁵ David Firestone, "Seed Planted in Brooklyn Blooms as Violence," *New York Times*, February 27, 1994; Kotler, *Heil Kahane*, 108.

⁵⁰⁶ David Rubin, Letter to supporters of Kach International, undated, Jabotinsky Institute archives, JDL collection, Kaf 24 - 10/4. Among the movement principles set out in the letter are Kahane's key policy drives: expulsion of all Palestinians from the "Land of Israel," a ban on intermarriage and mixed relationships, and the "elimination of Jew-hating criminals from the Land of Israel." The final principle listed calls for mass immigration to Israel, on the basis that there is "no future for the Jewish people in the Exile."

Jewish far right: an American-born movement that emigrated to Israel and advertised itself as the Israeli branch of a U.S. organization had, within a little over a decade, rebranded itself as an authentically Israeli institution—with a parliamentary representative—that was now re-exporting itself to the U.S.

‘Daughter of Israel, date only a son of Israel’

The opening months of Kahane’s Knesset term were, in some ways, a continuation of what had gone before, while also providing a harbinger of things to come. His election did nothing to temper his most extreme inclinations, and he pressed ahead with provoking his opponents, rousing his base, and expanding on his ideas about gender purity, racial segregation, mass expulsion, and the tyranny of the left, while enjoying the benefits of parliamentary immunity (although this was partially revoked in a December 1984 parliamentary vote). Calling a press conference immediately after his victory, Kahane reiterated his calls for all Palestinians within Israeli-controlled territory to be expelled and announced he would be opening an “emigration office” in the Palestinian town of Umm al-Fahm in northern Israel. The day after the election, Kach supporters—many of them in yellow shirts—marched through the Muslim Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, smashing shops, assaulting Palestinian merchants, and chanting “Arabs out.”⁵⁰⁷ A month later, dozens of Kach supporters physically assaulted four members of Knesset who were visiting the prison where members of the Jewish Underground were being held (the purpose of the trip was to try and make sure the Underground members were not receiving special treatment). The protesters called the MKs “PLO-lovers” and threatened to break their

⁵⁰⁷ Gil Sedan, “Fear and Apprehension Over Kahane’s Election to the Knesset,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, July 29, 1984.

legs.⁵⁰⁸ And in what was likely his first written message to supporters after getting elected, sent on paper with a Knesset letterhead, Kahane promised that together they would build “a large, strong movement that will clean the country of its enemies, ruiners, and destroyers.”⁵⁰⁹

To that end, as an MK Kahane continued to take to Israel’s squares up and down the country, holding large rallies during which he would inveigh against Palestinians—referring to them as “roaches” and “beasts”—and the left, including prominent liberal Zionist politicians such as Yossi Sarid and Shulamit Aloni, who at one event in July 1985 earned the epithet “Jewish prostitutes who employ Arab pimps.”⁵¹⁰ During the same rally, Kahane reportedly told his audience that Palestinians would, in a couple of years, “turn on the radio and hear that Kahane has been named Minister of Defense. Then they will come to me, bow to me, lick my feet, and I will be merciful and will allow them to leave. Whoever does not leave will be slaughtered.”⁵¹¹

Alongside the rallies, Kahane also continued staging publicity campaigns and releasing self-published periodicals.⁵¹² A few months after getting elected, for example, he held an event in Tel Aviv during which he “unveiled” an Israeli-Jewish woman who was, apparently, married to a

⁵⁰⁸ Hugh Orgel, “Kach Supporters Beat Four MKs,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, August 26, 1984.

⁵⁰⁹ Meir Kahane, “Personal Letter,” undated, Jabotinsky Institute archives, JDL collection, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

⁵¹⁰ Report by No’omi Cohen, a reporter for local newspaper *Kolbo Haifa*, cited in Robert I. Friedman, “The Sayings of Meir Kahane,” *The New York Review of Books* 33, no. 2 (February 13, 1986), <https://www.nybooks-com.proxy01.its.virginia.edu/articles/1986/02/13/the-sayings-of-rabbi-kahane/>.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁵¹² Kach published both a general journal and a youth movement journal. The main journal’s inaugural editorial stated that the purpose of the periodical was to attempt to circumvent the Israel Broadcasting Association’s informal “blackout” of Kach and Kahane. Moshe Potolsky, “Dvar HaOrekh” [“Editorial”], *Bitaon Tnuat Kach* [*Kach Movement Journal*] 1, December 1985-January 1986, National Library of Israel, Kach collection, 14319. The cover of the journal features the Kach emblem—a fist in a Star of David—superimposed over a near-borderless map of the Middle East; the only boundaries, such as they are, are marked by the Nile and the Euphrates, each labeled. The third and final site labeled on the map is Jerusalem.

Palestinian and who had been “rescued” from her relationship. Kahane, accompanied by an entourage in black shirts with the Kach logo and the words “Jewish Honor Guard” emblazoned across them, duly presented a “thin, frightened girl” to his audience. He declared his proposals for threatening and harassing both Jewish women and Palestinian men in mixed relationships: the “honor guard” would patrol cities to keep an eye on Palestinians, while affixing stickers in public spaces reading, “Arab! Don’t even dare think about a Jewish woman.” Other activists would visit the homes of Jewish women known or suspected to be in a relationship with a Palestinian, and “try to persuade her that she comes from the glorious Jewish people.” Should these efforts fail, Kahane continued, the woman’s face would be featured on posters that would be displayed throughout her neighborhood, with the caption, “This is the traitor to the Jewish people.” Reiterating his well-established credo, Kahane told the journalists: “There is a tremendous difference between the rape of a Jew and an Arab raping Jewesses. The Arab screws both the woman and the state, and that’s that....The motive of the Arab and the pimp, like the black who rapes a white woman, is that he knows that he’s got power and control over the Jewish state.”⁵¹³

In a related publicity campaign, launched in late 1986, Kach initiated a “national operation” against mixed relationships under the slogan “Daughter of Israel,” and declared the new Jewish year (5747) the year of a “war on assimilation.”⁵¹⁴ Central to the operation was a propaganda drive, including the distribution of thousands of flyers reading: “Daughter of Israel! You are the daughter of a great people, chosen and virtuous...Please don’t debase yourself. Don’t

⁵¹³ Kotler, *Heil Kahane*, 16-7.

⁵¹⁴ “Hadashot” [“News”], *Biton Tnuat Noar Kach* [Kach Youth Movement Journal] 2 (November 1986), 6, Jabotinsky Institute archives, JDL collection, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

go out with Arabs or gentiles of any kind. Daughter of Israel, date only a son of Israel.”⁵¹⁵ The January 1986 edition of *Kach Journal*, the party’s in-house organ, announced a new organization, Yad LaAchiot (“A Hand for the Sisters”), with the mission of “saving Jewish girls married to Arabs, and their children, from Arab villages.”⁵¹⁶ And a Kach booklet published that year, “Who’s to Blame for the Loss of the Jewish People?,” was part-scrapbook of U.S. newspaper clippings about mixed marriage services and rabbis offering interfaith wedding ceremonies, and part-call for action. Claiming to be “a cry for help” originating in the diaspora and aimed at Israeli leaders, the booklet decried “fake conversions” performed by Reform and Conservative (i.e. non-Orthodox) rabbis in the U.S., singled out converts born to “a gentile mother,” and called for Israel’s Law of Return to be restricted to those born to a Jewish mother or who had undergone an Orthodox conversion.⁵¹⁷

A separate campaign, also in 1986, focused on the Ashkenazi establishment’s mistreatment of Mizrahim; in addition to publishing “The Black Book,” mentioned above, Kach also reissued a booklet about the disappearance of thousands of Mizrahi, mainly Yemeni, babies from Israeli hospitals in the early years of the state. “‘I Am Looking for My Brothers’: The Truth About the Yemeni Jewish Holocaust” centered on the familiar themes of the corrupting influence of Western decadence and the spiritual and cultural destruction of Mizrahi Jewry, but also railed against the Labor Zionist elite for its hypocrisy in criticizing Kahane and his party for their

⁵¹⁵ Flyer reprinted in *ibid*.

⁵¹⁶ “Yad LaAchiot” advertisement, *Bitaon Tnuat Kach* [Kach Movement Journal] 1 (December 1985), 41, National Library of Israel, Kach collection, 14319.

⁵¹⁷ Kach, “Mi Ashem BaAvdan HaAm HaYehudi?” [“Who’s to Blame for the Loss of the Jewish People?”], 1987, Jabotinsky Institute archives, JDL collection, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

racism.⁵¹⁸ “The usual establishment that condemns Kach has been found out as having the most racist ideological roots, which it is now trying to whitewash,” the booklet reads, adding that the “left’s silence on the matter is truly bizarre.”⁵¹⁹ Nonetheless, the text continues, such behavior is to be expected from “antisemitic Israel-haters who are primarily concerned with protecting Arabs because they are goyim like them.”⁵²⁰

Kahane and his fellow party members also continued advocating for mass deportations of Palestinians, whether by starting chants of “Arabs out!” at rallies or promoting the aforementioned planned “emigration office” in Umm al-Fahm. In support of this project, Kach acolytes would point to previous examples of ethnic cleansing as a model: a snippet in the second issue of *Kach Journal*, for example, titled “OK, But How Can We Get Rid of Them?” pointed to Nigeria’s expulsion in May 1985 of hundreds of thousands of undocumented Ghanaians as an example that Israel could follow, illustrated by a photograph of hundreds of deportees crowded onto a convoy of trucks taking them out of the country. Two years later, Kach electoral candidate and campaign manager Baruch Goldstein would cite another such mass expulsion—also carried out by Nigeria, this time in 1983, that forced out around two million

⁵¹⁸ The title of the booklet is taken from Genesis 37:16. On the Yemeni baby kidnapping affair, see Shoshana Madmoni-Gerber, *Israeli Media and the Framing of Internal Conflict: The Yemenite Babies Affair* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Boaz Sangero, “B’Ein Hashad Ein Hakira Amitit” [“With No Suspicion There is No Real Investigation”], *Teoria U’Vikoret [Theory and Criticism]* 21 (Fall 2002), 47-76.

⁵¹⁹ Kach, “Mi Ashem.”

⁵²⁰ Kach, “‘Et Achi Anukhi Ani Mevakesh’: HaEmet Al Shoat Yehudei Teiman” [“I Am Looking for My Brothers’: The Truth About the Yemeni Jewish Holocaust”], 1987, Jabotinsky Institute archives, JDL collection, Kaf 24 - 10/4. Kahane made the same case to his English-speaking followers, writing in the January-February 1987 edition of *Kahane*, an English-language Kach magazine, that the Mizrahi “spiritual holocaust...in at least two senses...was more perverse and more serious than the one committed by the Nazis,” although he did not elaborate precisely what those senses were. Meir Kahane, “On Holocausts,” *Kahane: The Magazine of the Authentic Jewish Idea*, 12, YIVO archive, U.S. Territorial Collection, RG117 Box 47.

West Africans in the space of two weeks—as a model.⁵²¹ (Goldstein had previously had a letter published in the *New York Times* on the same theme, writing from Brooklyn that “Israel must act decisively to remove the Arab minority from its borders.” He concluded his missive on a Kahane-esque note: “Before instinctively defending democracy as inviolate, Israelis should consider whether the prospect of an Arab majority...is acceptable to them.”)⁵²² The movement also continued pressing the issue among its American-Jewish constituents, with Kach International sending out a flier titled “Transfer the Arabs Now!” and featuring an array of quotes from prominent Zionists—from 1895 to 1987, and from the political left and right—advocating for the “transfer” of Palestinians, including Theodor Herzl, David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Chaim Weizmann, and Moshe Dayan. The purpose served by the flier was to claim a long-held consensus on the matter, while at the same time—per the Jewish far right’s favored tactic—painting the Israeli left and center as hypocrites for criticizing Kach’s platform while having previously endorsed similar end goals, albeit (in some cases) more euphemistically phrased.⁵²³

As they had before Kach’s election victory, Kahane and his circle also aimed beyond the left and continued attacking those who might have been their closest political allies, but who were beginning to see in Kach’s rising popularity a threat to their own electoral base. In the inaugural edition of *Kach Journal*, published in December 1985, Moshe Potolsky—the journal

⁵²¹ Kach, “Tov, Aval Eikh Tokhlu Lesalek Otam?” [“OK, But How Do We Remove Them?”] *Bitaon Tnuat Kach 2* (January 1986), National Library of Israel, Kach collection, 14319; Sheila Rule, “Ghanaians, Expelled By Nigeria, Return Home to Start Over,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1985; Ellen Hosmer and Beverly Orr, “Did He Kill the Peace?” *Washington Post*, March 6, 1994; Lexie Verdon, “Nigeria Expels Illegal Aliens,” *Washington Post*, January 31, 1983.

⁵²² Baruch Goldstein, “Opinion: Israel Needs No New Enemy State at its Border,” *New York Times*, July 9, 1981.

⁵²³ Kach International, “Transfer the Arabs Now!” undated, likely late 1987. Jabotinsky Institute Archive, K210/4/4.

editor and number two on the party's 1981 electoral list—wrote an open letter to Geulah Cohen, accusing her, in not so many words, of “selling out” since becoming a Knesset member.

Evidence of this betrayal, Potolsky continued, could be found in Cohen's support for a proposed bill that would bar Kach from running for Knesset over its anti-democratic platform—a law that would likely, given their ideological proximity, affect Tehiya as well.⁵²⁴ “In my dozens, or hundreds, of visits to your home ... we discussed our ideology many times,” Potolsky wrote. “And you often attacked democracy as a principle.”⁵²⁵ Yet Potolsky's letter also had a broader scope, assailing Cohen for tabling a bill that would bar Knesset members from holding dual citizenship. Such a law, Potolsky wrote, had been designed with Kahane—an American-Israeli citizen—in mind, and its passage would “hurt the people of Israel” by preventing the rabbi from undertaking activism in the U.S.—whether fighting for Soviet and Syrian Jewry or visiting college campuses in order to try and prevent assimilation. The movement, Potolsky was essentially arguing, needed to be a transnational one (with Kahane at its head)—even as it militated for the liquidation of the diaspora.⁵²⁶

As a newly-minted member of Knesset, Kahane also had new means at his disposal in order to try and advance his ideas and spar with his political opponents: parliamentary inquiries and proposed legislation. A sampling of such communications and proposals from his four-year Knesset term thus reflects not only the accumulated racial and religious fixations that had driven

⁵²⁴ Moshe Potolsky, “Mikhtav Galui El Geulah Cohen” [“Open Letter to Geulah Cohen”], *Bitaon Kach* 1, 16.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

his career so far, but also the ways in which they had—via years of election manifestos and party propaganda—metamorphosed into a fascist political platform.

One of Kahane's most infamous political actions came almost as soon as he took office, with his proposed law to prevent assimilation and intermarriage. In its totality, the bill—which a committee headed by the Knesset speaker did not allow to progress to a first reading—sought to ban any activity that Kahane viewed as having the potential to encourage relationships between Jews and non-Jews. At the practical level, the proposal sought to shut down all Jewish-Palestinian summer camps, community centers, and other institutions and activities, including educational institutions. It also sought to establish separate beaches for Jews and non-Jews, with prison sentences of six months for attending the “wrong” beach. The law would have mandated Jewish residential “selection committees” which would have to vote in the majority to allow a non-Jew to live in a Jewish neighborhood or building (a status quo that was already *de facto* practiced in many communities across the country). Another clause mandated the teaching of anti-assimilationist curricula at all elementary and high schools. Almost half the bill was dedicated to regulating the sexual activities and relationships of Jewish citizens and residents: the first clause, barring religious and civil marriage between Jews and non-Jews, was already (and mostly remains) the law of the land, but Kahane proposed extending the ban to such marriages undertaken by Israeli-Jewish citizens and residents overseas. The law would further have criminalized any sexual contact between Jews and non-Jews, under the threat of a two-year prison sentence for the Jewish partner in the couple, and a three-year sentence for the non-Jewish partner. Existing mixed marriages were to be immediately dissolved, with any children

remaining with the mother.⁵²⁷ Then-Likud MK Michael Eitan, in what he later referred to as his “most prominent public work” as a politician, conducted a detailed comparison between Kach’s bill and the Nuremberg Laws.⁵²⁸

In the same vein, Kahane sent an official letter to President Chaim Herzog in October 1984, praising him for speaking out against assimilation in the diaspora and requesting him to do the same in Israel.⁵²⁹ (The rabbi struck a similar note in a *Jewish Press* column a year later, slamming Herzog for “refus[ing] to condemn intermarriage between Jews and Arabs in Israel.” In the same column, Kahane also took aim at the heads of the World Jewish Congress and AIPAC for marrying non-Jewish women; these men’s liberal outreach, he wrote, meant they were “do[ing] their best to castrate Judaism into a *pareve* eunuch.”)⁵³⁰ In a June 3, 1986 parliamentary inquiry, Kahane wrote to the Interior Ministry regarding a newspaper report about 140 kibbutz families who had adopted Brazilian children. Kahane wanted to know how many of those children remained in Israel; whether they had begun converting (to Judaism); and whether the relevant families had been instructed to begin the conversion process.⁵³¹ The following day, Kahane wrote again to Herzog declaring that contacts between Palestinian and Jewish children

⁵²⁷ Proposed law reprinted in Kotler, *Heil Kahane*, 198-202.

⁵²⁸ Twenty-third Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, Meeting transcript no. 224, May 23, 2004, <https://main.knesset.gov.il/Activity/Constitution/Pages/ConstProtocol224.aspx>.

⁵²⁹ Letter from Meir Kahane to President Chaim Herzog, October 19, 1984, Israel State Archives, ISA-President-LetterCredence-000e7au.

⁵³⁰ Meir Kahane, “Vinegar, Son of Wine,” *Jewish Press*, October 11, 1985, Israel State Archives, ISA-President-LetterCredence-000e7au.

⁵³¹ Parliamentary inquiry from Meir Kahane to the Interior Ministry, June 3, 1986, Israel State Archives, ISA-MOIN-minister-000lzpaxa.

be banned; he aimed this proposal in particular at Mizrahi parents, to whom he wrote: “You didn’t immigrate [from Muslim countries]...only to abandon your children.”⁵³²

The next month, July 1986, Kahane submitted a proposed “anti-terrorism” bill—which also fell at the first hurdle—that sought to provide the Israeli security services with total “freedom” to act how they see fit against “anyone who acts, or tries to act, against the State of Israel, against Israeli citizens or against Israeli property or against Jews either in Israel or abroad,” provided the suspect was not identifiable as a member of an enemy army. The bill, which did not define terrorism beyond “acting against” Israeli and Jewish people and property, also sought to prevent the Supreme Court and the wider judicial system from intervening in cases involving “terrorists.”⁵³³ Another inquiry to the Interior Ministry in February 1987 requested statistics on home demolitions in non-Jewish communities, how many homes had been built in such locales without permits, which planned demolitions were outstanding, and which homes were yet to receive demolition orders.⁵³⁴

The direction of travel of all these proposals—and the rallies, campaigns, and propaganda that accompanied them—was clear. It was the desire of Kahane and his movement, on both sides of the Atlantic, to segregate, immiserate, and eventually expel Palestinians; to control Jewish women’s bodies in a manner that eroded the boundary between the private and public realms, a hallmark of fascism; and to recast opponents of their ideology as traitors and thus illegitimate

⁵³² Letter from Meir Kahane to President Chaim Herzog, June 4, 1986. Israel State Archives, folder ISA-President-LetterCredence-000e7aw.

⁵³³ Proposed law by MK Meir Kahane, “Chok Neged Terror” [“Law Against Terrorism”], Nineteenth Knesset, July 21, 1986, Israel State Archives, ISA-justice-CounselingLegislation-000765e.

⁵³⁴ Meir Kahane, parliamentary inquiry to Interior Ministry, February 25, 1987, Israel State Archives, ISA-MOIN-minister-000lrzf.



Fig. 4.3: Kach, Front cover of "Bitaon Tnuat Kach" ["Kach Movement Journal"], no.1, Dec. 1985-Jan. 1986 showing the Kach logo superimposed over a borderless map of the Middle East. The Nile (bottom left) and Euphrates (top right) rivers are labeled, along with Jerusalem (center, under the edge of the fist). National Library of Israel, Kach collection, 14319.

members of the Israeli citizenry and of the Jewish people. The brazenness of Kahanism, and the bluntness of Kach's proposed policies, provoked intense reactions: during the early years of Kahane's term Knesset members walked out of the plenary hall when the rabbi took to the podium; during the same period the Israel Broadcasting Authority sustained an unofficial blackout on reporting on the activities of Kahane and Kach; and condemnations of Kahane's racism poured in from Israeli and American-Jewish institutions after his electoral victory and throughout his tenure. The Israeli Chief Rabbinate, for example, accused Kahane of going against the Torah in his views on Palestinians, while President Chaim Herzog refused to grant the Kach leader the customary meeting afforded to new members of Knesset.⁵³⁵ In the U.S., meanwhile, the American Jewish Congress decried Kahane as "Israel's Farrakhan" and compared his worldview to that of neo-Nazis; the outfit's executive director, Henry Siegman, particularly lamented that Kahane was an "American export."⁵³⁶ Other American-Jewish organizations, including the ADL, B'nai B'rith, and Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, released a joint statement condemning Kahane and praising Herzog for refusing to meet him, while also downplaying the spread of Kahanism.⁵³⁷ (Still other American Jews, however, wrote to Herzog slamming his treatment of Kahane, with one accusing the president of inconsistency for meeting with representatives of Maki, the Israeli communist party, but not the rabbi.)⁵³⁸

⁵³⁵ Gil Sedan, "Rabbinate Denounces Kahane," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, July 31, 1984. The criticism was particularly pointed, as it came amid a scandal in the U.S. over Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan's latest antisemitic outburst. David Friedman, "Farrakhan Denounces U.S. Jewish Leadership as 'Spiritually Blind,'" *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, July 31, 1984.

⁵³⁶ Judy Siegel, "AJCongress leaders call Kahane 'Israel's Farrakhan,'" *Jerusalem Post*, July 27, 1984.

⁵³⁷ Joint statement from the Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Committee, B'nai Brith, Hadassah, et al, August 15, 1985, Israel State Archives, ISA-President-Letter-Credence-000c7av.

⁵³⁸ For example, Letter from Kenneth S. Besig to President Chaim Herzog, August 1, 1984, Israel State Archives, file ISA-President-Letter-Credence-000c7av.

Grassroots activists in Israel also assiduously monitored Kach's activities, publishing anti-racist magazines that surveyed the movement's rhetoric and violence, and staging repeated counter-protests at Kahane's rallies and publicity stunts.⁵³⁹ Palestinians held a mass protest in Umm al-Fahm, where Kahane had announced plans to open an "emigration office," that was also attended by numerous Knesset members; speakers at the demonstration highlighted that the trends that facilitated Kahane's victory were of more concern than the man himself.⁵⁴⁰ Mizrahi demonstrators, including those affiliated with the Black Panthers, played a prominent role in many of these encounters. At a demonstration staged in summer 1985 by Mizrahi activists, who were protesting the lenient treatment and proposed clemency for Jewish Underground members that had been denied to jailed Black Panthers, a group of Kach supporters arrived and attempted to disrupt the proceedings; an altercation ensued, following which the Kahanists reportedly retreated—they discovered, one Mizrahi activist proudly recalled, that this time round they weren't dealing with "Peace Now or students," but rather residents of the "neighborhoods."⁵⁴¹ Also that summer, a Mizrahi "neighborhood task force" began distributing anti-Kahanist leaflets

⁵³⁹ See, for example, *"Don't Say 'We Didn't Know': Citizens Against Racism*, published throughout 1985, National Library of Israel, 14071.

⁵⁴⁰ Gil Sedan, "Thousands Stage Anti-Kahane Rally in an Arab Village," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, August 5, 1984. Umm al-Fahm is not, of course, a village, but rather a city; its population in the mid-1980s was around 20,000 people.

⁵⁴¹ Anat Magen, "We're the Neighborhoods, Not Peace Now," *Kol HaIr*, May 14, 1985. "Shchunot," or "neighborhoods" in Hebrew, is often used as a shorthand to refer to predominantly Mizrahi residential areas in Israeli cities.

in their communities, while stressing that extremism was an “Ashkenazi import” that was harming Mizrahim.⁵⁴²

Despite the resistance, however, and despite Kahane and Kach’s escalations, the man and his party’s popularity grew almost immediately after the election and remained elevated throughout Kahane’s four-year Knesset term. In a poll conducted in January 1985 by the Israeli daily *Maariv*, Kahane’s support had risen enough to grant his party five seats in a prospective election, up from three seats in comparable surveys taken in October and November 1984.⁵⁴³ Forty-two percent of young Israelis surveyed in the first half of 1985 said they agreed with Kahane’s views, with fifty-nine percent of religious youth giving the same response. A separate survey conducted earlier that year showed that fifty-seven percent of young Israelis thought Palestinians should be expelled from the West Bank, and forty-two percent saying that non-Jewish citizens in Israel should have reduced rights.⁵⁴⁴ While fluctuating over the next few years, often rising during times of increasing tensions with Palestinians, by the time the 1988 elections were imminent, Kach was projected to become the third-largest party in the Knesset, taking at least six seats.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴² “Neighborhood Taskforce Against Kahane,” *Kol HaIr*, August 23, 1985. Prominent Mizrahi intellectuals struck a similar tone during the deteriorating intracomunal strife in Israel following the 1982 Lebanon War, challenging the stereotypical attribution of far-right views to Mizrahim by pointing to the racist violence of the Ashkenazi, often American-born settler elite in the occupied West Bank. David K. Shipler, “Sephardim Are Transforming Israel’s Political Map,” *New York Times*, April 8, 1983.

⁵⁴³ “Radicalizatziyah LiKheora BaMaarekhet HaPolitiit” [“Apparent Radicalization in the Political System”], *Maariv*, January 11, 1985.

⁵⁴⁴ “59% of Religious Youth Agree with Kahane,” *Yedioth Ahronoth*, June 24, 1985. According to Robert Friedman, the results of the survey so shocked the Van Leer Institute, the Jerusalem-based research outfit that conducted it, that they initially buried the statistics. The findings were reported by *Haaretz* shortly after. Friedman, “Sayings of Meir Kahane.”

⁵⁴⁵ Sprinzak, “Emergence of the Israeli Radical Right,” 172; Ilan Kfir and Menachem Sheizaf, “Shamir Tomekh BaYozma BaLikud Lifsol Reshimat ‘Kach’ LaKnesset” [“Shamir Supports Likud Initiative to Disqualify ‘Kach’ List for Knesset”], *Hadashot*, August 22, 1988.

By that time, too, the institutional resistance to Kahane was waning: a January 1988 *Maariv* editorial expressed alarm that many MKs were no longer walking out of Kahane's speeches, and warned of rumblings about a possible slot for Kahane in a future Likud coalition.⁵⁴⁶ Kahane's support among American Jews during his parliamentary career, while not matching that in Israel, was also noteworthy: fourteen percent of those surveyed in 1986 said they strongly agreed with Kahane; among Orthodox Jews, that number rose to thirty percent.⁵⁴⁷

In defiance of the old maxim that sunlight is the best disinfectant, Kahane's increased exposure during his Knesset term—and his continued forceful expression of racist, sexist, and anti-left ideology, all of which made its way into fascist policy proposals—seemed only to increase his level of support, in spite of the very real and profound backlash to his ideas and his supporters' behavior. His growing popularity cannot, of course, be divorced from the wider turmoil in the country at the time—not least the after effects of the Sinai evacuation and the Jewish Underground affair, and, as we shall see in the following chapter, the first intifada, which began at the end of 1987. But there was also an undeniable political reality unfolding that would have dramatic implications for the land between the river and the sea: that even after witnessing the dehumanizing rhetoric, the street violence, and the persecutory impulses, some Israelis—as Ehud Sprinzak put it—“liked what they saw.”⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁶ “Hekhsher Pasul L’Kahane” [“An Unfit Legitimization of Kahane”], *Maariv*, January 4, 1988.

⁵⁴⁷ Friedman, *False Prophet*, 6-7.

⁵⁴⁸ Sprinzak, “Emergence of the Israeli Radical Right,” 171-2.

Redemption through neoliberalism

Kahane was not the only American import roiling Israeli society and politics during the mid-1980s. On July 1, 1985, Israel's unity government passed the Emergency Economic Stabilization Plan, which revolutionized the country's socioeconomic identity and policies and formally abandoned the remnants of the ostensibly socialist economy that Begin, upon his election in 1977, had worked assiduously to dismantle.⁵⁴⁹ With the Israeli economy already cratering as a result of the Yom Kippur War, Begin's tinkering inflicted additional economic upheaval on the country, with inflation rates soaring ever-further due to the government's embrace of economic liberalization. By the time the Likud-Alignment government was sworn in in 1984, the Israeli economy was on the precipice; salvation, the ruling coalition decided, lay in neoliberalism. By then, neoliberalism was well on its way to becoming the dominant economic model in the U.S. and Western Europe, not least due to its implementation by Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher; it was also fast becoming the favored model used by international financial institutions to discipline new, flagging, or unruly economies in developing countries. Israel, with its self-identification as part of the "West" and its relative newness as a country, fell—to an extent—into both these categories, and its transition to neoliberalism was backed by American and international economic bodies.

⁵⁴⁹ Michel Strawczynski and Joseph Zeira, "Reducing the Relative Size of Government in Israel after 1985," in *The Israeli Economy, 1985-1998: From Government Intervention to Market Economics*, ed. Avi Ben-Bassat (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 64; Uri Ram, *The Globalization of Israel: McWorld in Tel Aviv, Jihad in Jerusalem* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 53. This change in economic identity was profound, but not as unprecedented as is often implied in the literature; as numerous scholars have argued, socialism was always a secondary consideration to Jewish nationalism and nation-building, and the government largely followed market principles during the state's first decades. Shalev, "Have globalization and liberalization," 116.

Israel's economic transformation would play an important role both in the strengthening of the Israeli right, and in the relationship between the Israeli- and American-Jewish far right—especially as the 1990s approached and, with it, the Netanyahu era. As the Israeli political economist Arie Krampf has suggested, the relative economic independence Israel gained through its embrace of neoliberalism served to insulate it from outside pressure to moderate its national security policies; in effect, this allowed the Israeli right to persist with its illiberal policies—on both sides of the Green Line, and in the Gaza Strip—without suffering economic consequences.⁵⁵⁰

Equally, the neoliberal processes that began to accelerate in Israel from the mid-1980s onwards—privatization, deregulation, budget cuts, shrinking of the public sector, etc—opened up a significant space for far-right actors to begin asserting their own spatial and political visions, by bringing private capital into the vacuum created by the slashing of public funds. As we shall see in the following chapter, as the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, increasing amounts of this cash were provided by American-Jewish philanthropists and their foundations—those same individuals and outfits that had benefited so handsomely from the advent of Reaganomics in the U.S. But that trend was already beginning in the mid-1980s, with American-originated donor-advised funds—sometimes routed via Jewish federations—ending up in the coffers of far-right Israeli political groups. A representative example is the 1984 founding of American Friends of Ateret Cohanim (AFAC), a tax-exempt outfit which raised and donated money to its Israeli namesake—an activist group founded in 1982 (originally as Atara LeYoshna), with the express

⁵⁵⁰ Krampf, *Israeli Path to Neoliberalism*, 223. Krampf's assessment of Israel's turn to neoliberalism is that it was, early on, accompanied by a parallel liberalization in Israeli politics with the election of Yitzhak Rabin in 1992 (although this had been preceded by Shamir's second term as prime minister, when he led—from 1988 until 1992—the most right-wing government Israel had seen thus far).

purpose of acquiring property in the Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem’s Old City and other areas of East Jerusalem, and which relied primarily on donations from American Jews and Evangelicals.⁵⁵¹ Among AFAC’s major donors and co-founders was Irving Moskowitz, a Miami-based doctor and casino magnate who, since the mid-1980s, had been purchasing properties in East Jerusalem using his personal funds, while donating to groups such as AFAC via his tax-exempt, eponymous foundation.⁵⁵² The group’s inaugural fundraising dinner, held in May 1987, featured as its keynote speaker Israel’s ambassador to the UN—Benjamin Netanyahu.⁵⁵³

A further example comes via Monroe Spen, a Florida-based stockbroker who in 1985 established the Friends of the Jerusalem Temple Mount, a U.S.-based organization intended to direct funds to the Temple Mount Faithful, a fundamentalist group seeking to build the Third Temple where the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque currently stand.⁵⁵⁴ Spen, who distributed donations via his Spen Philanthropic Fund—itsself endowed with a local Jewish

⁵⁵¹ American Friends of Ateret Cohanim, IRS Form 1990, March 15, 2017. The founding date of the group is often reported as 1987; however, their tax forms provide the date as 1984. Previously, U.S. donations to Ateret Cohanim had been funneled via PEF Israel Endowment Funds, Inc., a long-established organization based in New York. Robert I. Friedman, “The ‘Redemption’ of Arab Jerusalem,” *Washington Post*, January 10, 1988. Ateret Cohanim, meaning “priestly crown,” is the name of the yeshiva established by a group of right-wing Jewish activists in 1978, which brought Jews to live in the Muslim Quarter for the first time since 1936. The group’s leader, Matityahu Cohen, was a graduate of Mercaz HaRav. Robert I. Friedman, “The Priestly Crown,” *Alicia Patterson Foundation*, 1987, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://aliciapatterson.org/stories/priestly-crown>.

⁵⁵² Hope Hamashige, Paul Lieberman, and Mary Curtius, “Bingo King Aids Israeli Right Wing,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 1996; Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 113.

⁵⁵³ Friedman, “‘Redemption’ of Arab Jerusalem.”

⁵⁵⁴ James D. Davis, “Faith and the Mountain: Jews Want Their Ancient Temple Site. Arabs Say No. What Happens Next May Affect Us All,” *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, December 1, 1991. As Davis notes in his report, the Temple Mount is a less central issue for the American-Jewish far right than for their Israeli counterparts. This is, in part, due to the phenomenon noted above wherein the American-Jewish far right is rather more secular than the Israeli far right. But as Davis’ interview subjects speculate, it is also, somewhat relatedly, because the building of the Third Temple is seen as a messianic act, and because many American Jews would balk at the idea of reviving Temple rituals. By contrast, many evangelical Christians are enthusiastic supporters of the project to restore the Jewish Temple.

Federation—had previously been a major contributor to Kach’s 1984 election campaign, and would help sponsor a U.S. visit Kahane made in 1987.⁵⁵⁵

The 1980s activities of men like Moskowitz and Spen, and the causes they supported in Israel, were early indicators of a coming wave of hundreds of millions of dollars funneled to settlement projects and far-right institutions. This funding pipeline was the culmination of multiple processes: the changes in the nature and scope of American-Jewish philanthropy; an increasing ideological proximity between the Jewish far right in Israel and the U.S. as shifting geopolitics and war in Israel fostered a common logic of a “clash of civilizations” between “the West” and Islam; and a right-wing turn in each country that bolstered the previous two trends, while narrowing the gap between the American-Jewish far right and the mainstream in terms of their stance on Israel. The advent of the first intifada at the end of 1987 only affirmed, for the Jewish far right, the messages they had been developing since the early 1980s that effaced the oppression of Israeli occupation, displacement, and segregation by framing it all within the logic of national security—divorcing the actions of the Israeli state and of far-right actors from their historical antecedents, while contextualizing them in a manner legible to observers and policymakers in Washington and beyond.

These dynamics all heralded the coming dominance of Netanyahu over Israeli politics. And they also foreshadowed, albeit indirectly, the waning relevance of Kahanism as a discrete

⁵⁵⁵ Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 145; Jeanne Pugh, “Extremist Rabbi Kahane Stirs Up Jews,” *Tampa Bay Times*, November 14, 1997. Spen established the Friends of the Jerusalem Temple Mount after an unsuccessful 1986 effort to unite the various Temple Mount factions; the Kahanists clashed with the Temple Mount Faithful, with the former urging illegal and confrontational tactics, and the latter seeking a more incrementalist approach. Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 146.

far-right phenomenon—not because his ideas were increasingly considered beyond the pale, but rather because they were—to return to Reto Hoffman and Federico Finchelstein—in the process of being appropriated by, and folded into, a mode of far-right politics that was more suited to the realities of the approaching twenty-first century. Yet even as this transition occurred, Kahanism would remain a valuable rhetorical tool for the far right in the decade to come, as the devastating violence of its adherents provided a highly visible phenomenon that could, when deflection was required, be separated out and characterized as exogenous to Israeli politics and, indeed, to Zionism.

It is partly for these reasons that the ban which prevented Kach from running in the 1988 election—the same election that brought Netanyahu into the Knesset for the first time as a member of Likud—was not the mortal blow to right-wing extremism that observers had suggested it might be. Yet it was also, as Igal Sarna warned when the Supreme Court allowed Kach to run in 1984, because the genie was already out of the bottle: the events of the 1980s made clear that even as local conditions created space for Kahane to strike a chord and build a base of support, he also played an important role in coarsening the discourse, radicalizing a subset of Israelis—particularly youth—and inspiring lethal violence, especially among American Jews who had followed him to Israel.

Toward the end of Kahane's first Knesset term, and ahead of what looked to be a leap in his vote share in the 1988 election, Kahane speculated that that year would be a pivotal one for his project and his movement. Reflecting on the significance of the number forty in Judaism, and particularly its recurrence in God's warnings and punishments, the rabbi looked back to the founding of Israel in 1948 and extrapolated that 1988 (or thereabouts) would present “a last

opportunity to reverse needless disaster, to bring the redemption with grandeur and majesty.”⁵⁵⁶

Kahane was often given to declaring imminent catastrophe—doing so was intrinsic to his presentation of a zero-sum game in which Jews had to choose between supremacism and annihilation. He could not know at the time, of course, as far as his own life was concerned, catastrophe was indeed imminent. But nor did he know the extent to which his movement would outlive and outgrow him.

⁵⁵⁶ Kahane, *Uncomfortable Questions*, 323.

Chapter 5: The Instruments of Havoc

As Kahane and Kach gathered strength throughout the mid-to-late-1980s, warnings abounded that the radicalization of Israel's far right would lead to calamity. Yet even those sounding the alarm would have struggled to predict that, by the middle of the following decade, two Jewish terrorists—one American, one Israeli—would have, respectively, committed one of the worst massacres in Israel's history, and assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Moreover, observers who had attributed the growing extremism in Israel to Kahane alone would find themselves at a loss to explain how both those incidents, which occurred 20 months apart, had unfolded after Kahane himself had been shot dead in New York in 1990. A further jolt came with the electoral success of Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu in spring 1996, a mere seven months after the murder of Yitzhak Rabin that he had helped to incite.

Those developments are rooted both in the recommencement of a by-now familiar cycle, whereby a sense of existential crisis for the far right—in this case, caused by the Oslo Accords—would provoke evermore drastic attempts at violent sabotage; and in the culmination of a gradual process wherein the far right, through assiduous organizing and the mainstreaming of its ideas, cemented its hold on political power in Israel. If the 1977 election of a far-right prime minister in a country that had only ever known Labor-Zionist leadership seemed like an anomaly, by the time Netanyahu was elected prime minister in the wake of Rabin's 1995 murder, the far right's

near-permanent occupancy of the government would seem like the natural order of things. In the long run, given Israel's post-1977 history, it is Labor's return to power in 1992 that would come to seem aberrant.

Yet it was not just in those two horrendous acts of violence that many of the past few decades' trends on the transnational Jewish far right reached their peak as the mid-1990s approached. The staggered end of the Cold War marked the parallel falling away of communism as the predominant enemy in the U.S. (and by extension its allies), and the subsequent swiveling of the neoconservative far right's "clash of civilizations" narrative to Islam—a realignment that would, throughout the 1990s and beyond, draw the American-Jewish and Israeli far right even closer together. In particular, this had profound ramifications for the Jewish far right's ability to mobilize against the struggle for Palestinian rights, by enabling the movement to portray Palestinian opposition to Israeli oppression as simply another piece of the "radical Islamist" puzzle—one that the world now had to work in concert to solve, and which Israel, by dint of its location and political history, was positioned to lead. This narrative was, as we saw in the previous chapter, a central part of Netanyahu's rise to international prominence. This geopolitical recalibration also allowed for the continued influence of American-Jewish neoconservatives, whose framework on the conjoined fates of American and Israeli defense and security, and by extension that of the world, was well-primed to pivot from catastrophizing about communism to doing the same about Islam. And the growing power of this stream of the transnational Jewish far right was further reflected in leadership changes at some of the most important American-Jewish establishment organizations, as well as in the emergence of copycat neoconservative institutions in Israel-Palestine.

These developments all marked the maturation of the transnational Jewish far right, as well as of the ties that bound them together. As the late 1980s gave way to the early-to-mid-1990s, the pugnacious, histrionic, and id-like brand of far-right Jewish internationalism modeled by Kahane made way for the relatively more sober ultranationalism and racism of Netanyahu, grounded in the language of stateship and national security, rather than in the language of revolution and biblical prophecy; and mapped out and enacted for the most part through policy papers and in the corridors of power, rather than through one-man streams of invective and in the streets. This is not to say, of course, that the transnational Jewish far right secularized: the religious far right, particularly the Israeli far right, would continue to play a central part in the movement. But with the rise of Netanyahu, and all that he represented, the movement experienced a kind of refurbishment that put it in stead to succeed in the world that was emerging as the new millennium approached. And yet for all that Kahane's days were numbered during this period, his ideas would, as we shall see, find a comfortable and productive home in this new phase of the Jewish far right.

‘Take out your Torah and Talmud and burn them all’

Back in 1988, however, much was made of Israel's decision to bar Kach from running for election and the supposed blow it represented for his way of thinking. The ruling of the Central Election Commission, which was unanimously upheld by the Supreme Court, was widely characterized as a rebuke of the party's racism: indeed, that was held to be the sole reason for the ostracization of Kahane's organization. Yet while the anti-democratic and racist nature of Kach's

platform provided the legal basis for the party's banning, the motivation to exclude it from the running was far less noble.

As the November 1988 elections approached, Kach—buoyed by the first intifada, which was driving Israelis rightward, and by the normalization of Kahane's presence in the Knesset—was projected to win six seats, which would have made it the third-largest party in the likely governing coalition that would result.⁵⁵⁷ As party head, Kahane would, as Ehud Sprinzak told journalist Robert Friedman at the time, “almost certainly ... get a cabinet post” as part of a Likud government. Although Kahane would never get his much-coveted defense minister assignment (recall the rabbi's 1985 declaration that if he were to be appointed defense minister, Palestinians would “come to me, bow to me, lick my feet, and I will be merciful and will allow them to leave. Whoever does not leave will be slaughtered”), he would likely be appointed interior minister—responsible, among other things, for civil rights.⁵⁵⁸

With a potential substantial increase in his party's power seemingly within touching distance, Kahane cleaved to his customary themes in Kach's 1988 election campaign materials. In one broadcast, delivered in English, he warns of “the destruction of Israel, not through bullets but through Arab babies”; later on in the same clip, he invokes the Hebron massacre of 1929 to suggest that the first intifada was not about seeking national and civil rights, but about hatred of Jews. Later still, a narrator—accompanied by the '80s pop rhythms of Whitney Houston's “So Emotional”—intones that “The Jewish daughter, Bas Yisroel, der Yiddisher Tochter, was always a symbol of purity and morality ... the secular society which developed [in Israel] has imitated

⁵⁵⁷ See previous chapter for Israeli press commentary on the normalization of Kahane's status as an MK.

⁵⁵⁸ Friedman, *False Prophet*, 257-8; Report by No'omi Cohen, a reporter for local newspaper *Kolbo Haifa*, cited in Friedman, “The Sayings of Meir Kahane.”

the most degenerate aspects of Western culture”; then, moving onto the economy, Kahane calls for free enterprise, capitalism, tax cuts, and—implicitly—deregulation. Finally, he invokes once more “the tragic and the painful contradiction between a Jewish state and a western democracy,” before concluding that “they [Palestinians] must go.”⁵⁵⁹ A campaign booklet, meanwhile, attacks the unity government Kach had spent the past four years in opposition to: the opening pages cite “four years of terror, terror attacks, and horror,” and “four years of assimilation and miscegenation”; dwelling further on the issue of demography, the booklet goes on to warn about “the Arab birth rate” and “our daughters [being] assimilated by Arabs,” and accuses the current government of “bringing a national Holocaust upon us.” Moving onto Kach’s economic platform, there is a proposal to break up workers’ unions while prioritizing “Hebrew labor,” while its education policies, somewhat confusingly, call for the release of the Jewish Underground and “all other prisoners who acted on behalf of the nation,” as well as for a “war on drugs” and to break the apparent left-wing monopoly over media outlets.⁵⁶⁰

Israel’s other far-right parties, chiefly Likud and Tehiya—led by Lehi alumni Yitzhak Shamir (also then-sitting prime minister) and Geulah Cohen, respectively—saw Kach as a threat

⁵⁵⁹ Kach, “1988 Election Broadcast,” accessed April 14, 2022, <https://www.rabbikahane.org/watch?id=28>. Kach was not the only party calling for mass “transfer”—Moledet (“Homeland”), formed in 1988 by the far-right ideologue and former army general Rehavam Ze’evi in response to the intifada, also sought to remove all Palestinians from Israeli-controlled territory. In contrast to Kach, however, Moledet insisted that it sought only “voluntary transfer.” Moledet also proposed “strict oversight of private Arab schools”; the “shuttering” of universities linked with the uprising; and expulsion of “inciters and rioters.” Moledet, “There is only one homeland!” National Library of Israel, 12th Knesset Election Campaign Materials, accessed April 15, 2022, https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/Hebrew/collections/treasures/elections/elections_materials/Pages/elect_ephemera_1988.aspx; Don Peretz and Sammy Smooha, “Israel’s Twelfth Knesset Election: An All-Loser Game,” *The Middle East Journal* 43, no. 3 (Summer 1989), 391. Moledet won two seats in the 1988 election; although it picked up some of Kach’s supporters, many also voted for the two Haredi parties—Agudath Yisrael and Shas, catering to Ashkenazi and Sephardi Orthodoxy, respectively. Pedahzur, *Triumph of Israel’s Radical Right*, 77.

⁵⁶⁰ Kach, “Dear Jews! The Country is Collapsing,” 1988, Central Zionist Archive, Kahane collection, A536/90.

to their own electoral success.⁵⁶¹ (Not that Tehiya, as the vastly smaller of the two parties, wanted to do Likud any favors, either: in an election broadcast, Cohen invoked the specter of Yamit as she urged voters to reject the “untrustworthy” Likud and choose Tehiya in order to prevent a Palestinian state “already on its way”; Likud, for its part, was more concerned with fighting off the Labor-Zionist, Shimon Peres-headed Alignment.)⁵⁶² It was Cohen and Shamir who, despite having guided Kahane into his anti-Soviet phase as JDL head and, in Cohen’s case, championing him when he arrived in Israel in the early 1970s, led the efforts to strike Kach from the electoral running.⁵⁶³ When the Supreme Court upheld the ban just weeks before the election, Kahane—surrounded by his enraged supporters—erupted outside the courthouse. Lashing out at what he saw as the hypocrisy of the decision, and returning to his central theme of the incompatibility of democracy and Judaism in setting the law of the land, Kahane bellowed: “If my bill that would have criminalized intermarriage and sexual intercourse is racism, then take out your Torah and Talmud and burn them all . . . thousands of Jewish women are married to Arabs. That’s democracy! Do you want that?”⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶¹ A political cartoon published after Kach was barred from running in the elections shows the heads of Likud, Tehiya, Moledet, and Tzomet, another small far-right party, each clutching a butterfly net trying to catch loose Kach voting slips that are fluttering through the air. “Right-wing parties fight for Kahane’s voters,” *Al Ha-Mishmar*, October 1988, National Library of Israel, 12th Knesset Election Campaign Materials Collection, accessed April 15, 2022, https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/Hebrew/collections/treasures/elections/elections_materials/Pages/elec_newspaper_1988.aspx.

⁵⁶² Tehiya, 1988 election broadcast,” National Library of Israel, 12th Knesset Election Campaign Materials Collection, accessed April 14, 2022, https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/Hebrew/collections/treasures/elections/elections_materials/Pages/elec_videos_1988.aspx#1988_4.

⁵⁶³ Friedman, *False Prophet*, 105-6, 258.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 258. The decision to ban Kach was welcomed by the American-Jewish establishment; Abe Foxman, the recently-appointed ADL chief (and former Betarnik) called the ban “a blow against racism and a triumph for decency and democracy in Israel.” David Landau, “Court Ruling Disqualifying Kahane Seen As Boon to Likud,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 19, 1988.

Israel's twelfth elections were, then, contested without Kahane—and without the rest of the Kach list, almost all of whose members had been involved in Kach's anti-miscegenation offshoot, Yad LaAchiot, and many of whom had cut their teeth on the campaign to prevent the Sinai withdrawal—including Michael Ben-Ari; ex-JDL senior officer Abraham Hershkowitz, who had sat in a U.S. jail in the 1970s for his role in a plot to hijack an Arab airliner; and the American-born Baruch Marzel. Marzel and Ben-Ari would, in later decades, go on to form their own Kahanist party.⁵⁶⁵

Even as Kach and its list were ejected from the running, however—which would prompt Kahane to hightail it to the U.S. to regroup—another prominent right-winger would be making the opposite journey. Netanyahu, nearing the end of his star-making turn as Israel's UN ambassador, began laying the groundwork for a slot on Likud's list for the 1988 elections. After resigning from his UN post, he returned to Israel and began campaigning in earnest, with the help of plentiful funding from American donors whom he had conscientiously cultivated as he worked the Republican sectors of the American-Jewish elite in New York; he deployed, too, “American” campaign methods fueled by masses of data on the members of the Likud Central Committee who would decide his fate.⁵⁶⁶ Placing ninth on the list—four spots above Benny Begin, son of the former prime minister, who was also entering politics for the first time—Netanyahu was put in charge of monitoring the party's polls in the lead-up to the election (in an apparent snub by Likud veterans aggrieved at the newcomer's popularity). Having reached his party position using American dollars and tactics, Netanyahu now swung for an American

⁵⁶⁵ Kach, “Mi v'Mi BaHolkhim im HaRav Kahane: MiMuamdei 'Kach' La-Knesset Ha-12” [“Who's Going With Rabbi Kahane: Kach Candidates for the 12th Knesset”], Jabotinsky Institute archives, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

⁵⁶⁶ Pfeffer, *Bibi*, 166; Caspit, *Netanyahu Years*, 78.

pollster, bringing in the then-little-known Frank Luntz; he also imported U.S.-style public events, touring the nation's markets in the run-up to the election in "the closest thing to an American political campaign to be found in Israel in 1988."⁵⁶⁷

As it turned out, the sidelining of Kach; the rising political stardom of Netanyahu; and the electorate's intense focus on the conflict and security, given the ongoing intifada, did not bring about a sweeping Likud victory. The intifada, in particular, proved to be the wedge that drove voters apart: some demanded an even harsher crackdown on Palestinians in response to the uprising; others urged their leaders to seek compromise and a political resolution to end the conflict.⁵⁶⁸ And the non-impact of Kach's disqualification on Likud's vote share contradicted the predictions of pollsters, who believed that Shamir's party would reap the benefits.⁵⁶⁹ As in 1984, Peres and Shamir's parties came out neck-and-neck and were compelled to band together as part of a national unity government, with each lacking the numbers needed to form an outright left- or right-wing coalition. Indeed, as Don Peretz and Sammy Smooha wrote in their post-mortem of the contest, no party—or even faction—came out victorious. A strong showing across the religious bloc was squandered by those parties "overreaching themselves" and making excessive demands to join the coalition; and Shamir and Peres, spooked by the success of the Haredi parties, decided to join forces in part to keep those parties out.⁵⁷⁰ The result, then, was once again an entirely ideologically mismatched coalition—one that would collapse within eighteen months, leading to Israel's most far-right government yet.

⁵⁶⁷ Caspit, *Netanyahu Years*, 84-5.

⁵⁶⁸ Peretz and Smooha, "Israel's Twelfth Knesset Election," 392.

⁵⁶⁹ Landau, "Court Ruling."

⁵⁷⁰ Peretz and Smooha, "Israel's Twelfth Knesset Election," 399.

‘A man of passion and conviction’

Kach, meanwhile, scrambled to maintain its relevance after what was supposed to be a mortal blow to Kahane and Kahanism. In the wake of the ban, Kahane immediately announced his intention to revitalize his transnational movement by embarking on an aggressive fundraising and awareness-raising campaign in the U.S. on the one hand, and launching a new Israeli political party in an attempt to circumvent the electoral ban on the other. He returned to the U.S. before the election, having sued to be allowed to enter the country following the State Department’s declaration that he was inadmissible after renouncing his American citizenship upon being elected to the Knesset in 1984.⁵⁷¹ Once there, he held a press conference in New York to announce that Kach would now be known as Koach (“Strength”; the Hebrew word looks very similar to that for “Kach”), and that he would be making “cosmetic changes” to its manifesto in order to become eligible to run for election once more.⁵⁷² Kahane also said that the new party platform would be entirely composed of Torah quotations, a callback to one of his favored means of pushing back on his critics: accusing them of hypocrisy and the betrayal of Judaism by claiming that his policies were all based on Jewish scripture and *halacha*.

Kahane followed up his press conference with a three-week speaking tour across the U.S. at various synagogues and Orthodox youth groups (he also, according to the scholar Jeffery

⁵⁷¹ Howard Rosenberg, “State Department Says Kahane No Longer a Citizen,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 26, 1988; Andrew Silow Carroll, “Judge Says Kahane Can Return to U.S., Overruling Government,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 27, 1988.

⁵⁷² Yitzhak Rabi, “Kahane Will Reorganize Kach Party to Run in Israel’s Next Election,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, November 1, 1988.

Gurock, remained a highly sought-after speaker at Yeshiva University).⁵⁷³ A fall 1988 Kach International newsletter, which denounced the “rigged election” and “election thieves” and reiterated Kahane’s promise to retool his political party, somewhat contradictorily claimed that “for organizational purposes, unrestricted travel for Rabbi Kahane to and from the US is far more important than fruitless legal battles for Knesset seats.” Vowing to “expand our US base of support,” the organization set out a proposal strikingly similar to the JDL’s original statement of principles: assembling small groups of activists in order to bring about “fundamental changes in the religious and national consciousness of the Jewish people.”⁵⁷⁴ In other words, Kach was admitting that, in the U.S. at least, it needed to go back to square one—even as it boasted (not inaccurately) of a significant base of support in Israel.

Kahane spent the following two years shuttling back and forth between the U.S. and Israel. His publicity stunts included declaring the establishment of the “Free State of Judea” in early 1989, which went mostly unreported by the Israeli media but which won the backing—and participation—of members of Gush Emunim and Mercaz HaRav students.⁵⁷⁵ Kahane and his supporters continued their violent disturbances across the country, while a group that identified with Kach, the Sicarii, committed a number of terror attacks in the first half of 1989 that targeted

⁵⁷³ Kach International, “Newsletter of Kach International and the Authentic Jewish Idea,” October-December 1988, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Kaf - 24 10/4; Steven Bayme, “Torah and Science,” Review of Jeffery S. Gurock, *The Men and Women of Yeshiva* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), *Commentary* 87, no. 2 (February 1, 1989), 75.

⁵⁷⁴ Kach International, “Newsletter.”

⁵⁷⁵ Hugh Orgel, “Kahane Declares New State of Judea,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, January 20, 1989; Pedahzur and Perliger, *Jewish Terrorism in Israel*, 93-4. Kahane even went so far as to issue “citizenship” cards, featuring the label “Young Lion of Judea.” State of Judea citizenship card, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Kaf - 24 10/4. In later years, proponents of a “State of Judea” would voice their support for Serbia in the Balkans war, seeing in the Serbian enclave of Bosnia—Republika Srpska—a model for their own desired ethnically-cleansed homeland. “Kahane Chai Leader Shows Support for Serbian Side of Yugoslav War,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, April 29, 1994.

Palestinians, liberals, and journalists, partly in protest at Kach's election ban.⁵⁷⁶ Kahane himself also remained in consistent legal trouble in Israel, facing an indictment for subversion and charges for disturbing the public order.⁵⁷⁷ He continued to goad his supporters, incite against Palestinians and the left, and promote his violent political vision, telling a San Francisco audience in February 1990 that he would, if appointed defense minister, be able to end the ongoing intifada within days: firstly by barring journalists from the West Bank, and then telling Israeli soldiers that they had "two days to do whatever you need to do."⁵⁷⁸ A few months later, he staged a protest in the central Israeli city of Rishon LeTzion in support of Ami Popper, an Israeli who had murdered seven Palestinian laborers there earlier that month. Questioning the outrage over the massacre, Kahane voiced his support for killings in biblical terms. "A Jew came and killed seven Israel-hating Ishmaelites," he said, addressing Kach activists via a megaphone. "So seven Ishmaelites died. Big deal." In response, his supporters called out: "Why aren't there

⁵⁷⁶ See, for example, David Landau, "Splinter Group Takes Credit for Fire at Pollster's Home," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, February 14, 1989; Gil Sedan and David Landau, "Jewish Underground Suspected in Shooting Near Jaffa Gate," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, April 12, 1989; Gil Sedan, "One Killed in West Bank," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, May 11, 1989; Hugh Orgel, "Police Defuse Bomb Outside Ma'ariv," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, January 16, 1990; Pedahzur and Perliger, *Jewish Terrorism in Israel*, 93.

⁵⁷⁷ Baruch Meiri, "Praklit HaRav Kahane: Levatel HaIshum Ki Hu Lo Chatum" ["Rabbi Kahane's Lawyer: Cancel the Indictment Because it Wasn't Signed"], *Maariv*, April 3, 1990; Baruch Meiri, "Meir Kahane Huasham BaHafarat HaSeder HaTzibori Leaher Retzah Shnei Yehudim" ["Meir Kahane Accused of Disturbing the Public Order After the Murder of Two Jews"], *Maariv*, September 25, 1990. Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz acted as a consultant for Kahane's legal team in the former case. Alan Dershowitz, "Why I'm Defending Rabbi Kahane's Right to Speak," *The Jewish Press*, March 25, 1990. Jabotinsky Institute archives, Kaf - 24 10/4.

⁵⁷⁸ Sue Barnett, "Kahane Debates an Empty Chair in S.F.," *The Jewish News of Northern California*, February 23, 1990. Incidentally, a video game developed by a Russian-born Israeli programmer the previous year, *Intifada*, addressed just such a scenario: the player takes on the role of an Israeli soldier in the West Bank facing Palestinians throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails. At first, the player is only allowed to use a wooden baton, tear gas, and rubber-coated bullets. If the player sticks to the rules of engagement, they are rewarded with a more right-wing government and more lax open-fire regulations, eventually allowing for live ammunition to be used freely. With each progression, the defense minister changes: the "worst" option is Yossi Sarid, of the left-wing Ratz party; as the player progresses through the game, the post is taken by Ariel Sharon and, finally, Meir Kahane. The game was popular among 13-16-year-old Israelis. Linda Gradstein, "Intifada Video Game Violence," *Washington Post*, July 7, 1989.

fifty more [people] like you? Hail Kahane!”⁵⁷⁹ The following week, Kahane praised an arson attack on the Jerusalem offices of Peace Now.⁵⁸⁰

Despite Kahane and his movement rarely leaving the public eye, however, Kach remained in dire need of funds. In the fall of 1990, Kahane flew to the U.S. for another speaking tour; in the process, as his movement had done in the past, it attempted to revivify its finances by announcing a new spin-off group—Zionist Emergency Exile Evacuation Rescue Organization (ZEEERO)—with an inaugural conference to be held in New York City on November 5, 1990.⁵⁸¹ Kahane, who had arrived on the east coast from Miami and had further speaking engagements booked around the country, addressed an audience of between sixty and seventy people in a conference room at Manhattan’s Marriott Hotel, before staying behind afterwards to hobnob with admiring attendees. As Kahane was answering questions, El-Sayyid Nosair, an Egyptian-born U.S. citizen, walked up to him and shot him twice: once in the neck, and once in the chest. Less than an hour later, Kahane was declared dead at the hospital to where he—and those wounded in the attack, including Nosair—had been evacuated.⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁹ Ben Caspit, “Anshei ‘Kach’ Bau Lehizdahut Im Retzah Ha Shiva’a BeRashla”tz v’Hitamtu Im Mafginei ‘Shalom Achshav” [“Kach Supporters Arrive in Rishon LeTzion to Identify With Ami Popper and Clash With Peace Now Protesters”], *Maariv*, May 29, 1990. The massacre may well have prolonged the intifada, which had, until then, appeared to be dying down; the murders prompted retaliatory killings of Israeli Jews by Palestinians and a wave of violent protests on both sides of the Green Line. David Landau, “5750 fades with Israel wondering where to put emigres,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, September 21, 1990.

⁵⁸⁰ Ron Kampeas, “Kahane to Face Charges After Hailing Arson Against Peace Now,” *Jerusalem Post*, June 5, 1990.

⁵⁸¹ Robert D. McFadden, “The Scene: A Smile, Two Shots,” *New York Times*, November 6, 1990. ZEEERO had, in fact, popped up years earlier, with an apocalyptic flier—soliciting contributions—that warned “the Zero Hour for the Jews of the Exile Approaches.” The flier is undated, but its fierce condemnation of Begin suggests it appeared in the late 1970s or early 1980s. Zionist Emergency Exile Evacuation Organization, “ZEEERO!” undated, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Kaf - 24, 10/4.

⁵⁸² Ibid; Advertisement for Meir Kahane event on November 14, 1990, “Are We Losing the Battle for the State of Israel?” *The Jewish News of Northern California*, November 2, 1990.

As befitting a man who led a transnational movement, Kahane received two funerals: one in New York, and one in Jerusalem. In New York, thousands of supporters crowded outside the synagogue where the eulogy took place the day after the assassination, and followed the coffin—draped in the Israeli flag—as it was brought out and taken to a waiting hearse.⁵⁸³ The following day, in Jerusalem, Kahane’s second funeral attracted a multiple of the attendees, with tens of thousands following the procession to the Mount of Olives. Some of the mourners attacked Palestinians, members of the press, and police, and violence bubbled up in other parts of the city.⁵⁸⁴ This was the spillover of the immediate threats of revenge from Kahane’s supporters following the assassination, and although the government had stepped up security for the funeral, for two Palestinians in their 60s, a woman and a man, it was too late: within hours of Kahane’s killing, a Kach supporter had gunned the pair down in the West Bank.⁵⁸⁵

Kahane’s supporters publicly vowed to carry on his movement: one of Kach’s newsletters, published in the months following his death, told its readers that “Rabbi Meir Kahane cannot be buried, nor can our spirit be broken.”⁵⁸⁶ Kach members also continued the

⁵⁸³ Elli Wohlgelemerter, “Kahane, Though Vilified By Many, is Remembered as Protector of Jews,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, November 7, 1990.

⁵⁸⁴ David Landau and Gil Sedan, “Riots Accompany Kahane Funeral as Arabs and Media Are Set Upon,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, November 8, 1990.

⁵⁸⁵ Yossi Levi and Yehuda Golan, “Hashash MiPeulot Nakam LeAcher Retzah Kahane” [“Fear of Revenge Acts Following Kahane’s Murder”], *Maariv*, November 7, 1990. Among those arrested in connection with the attack were Benzi Gopstein, who went on to found the anti-miscegenation group Lehava, and the American-born David Axelrod (now Ha’ivri), who would later sit on the Samaria Regional Council. Also under investigation were Kahane’s youngest son, Binyamin Ze’ev Kahane, and the New York-born Lenny Goldberg. The latter would make the headlines numerous times over the coming decades in connection with far-right extremism, including as the father of the bride in the so-called “hate wedding” in 2015, where right-wing settlers celebrated the Duma arson attack that killed three Palestinians, including a baby, the previous summer. Pedahzur and Perliger, *Jewish Terrorism*, 96; Gil Sedan, “Kahane’s Son a Suspect in Killings of Arabs,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, November 19, 1991.

⁵⁸⁶ “Dvar HaMaarekhet” [“Editorial”], *Bitaon El-Nakam* no. 6, February 1991, 2, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Kaf 24 - 10/4.

publicity stunts favored by their late mentor: in February 1991, several activists—among them Yekutiel Ben Yaakov (formerly Mike Guzovsky), an American-born Kachnik—was arrested while trying to take over CNN’s offices in Tel Aviv in order to send a “Jewish message” to the world.⁵⁸⁷ But behind the scenes, Kach’s leadership feared a further blow to their movement’s momentum and legitimacy, with the loss of its leader coming just two years after Kach’s electoral ban. Without Kahane’s speaking tours in the U.S., the movement’s most significant source of funds had dried up. And although there were younger Kach activists who could potentially take the reins, Kach’s leadership acknowledged that Kahane was, in effect, irreplaceable.⁵⁸⁸ To boot, Kahane’s death in short order led to a split between Kach’s different leadership factions who disagreed on how to reestablish the movement: one group, made up of members of Kahane’s inner circle, sought to focus on reacquiring electoral legitimacy and were prepared to adapt in order to do so (which Kahane himself had suggested he would do, although it was unclear whether he would actually follow through); a second, unwilling to relinquish Kach’s violent tactics, splintered off to form the group Kahane Chai (“Kahane Lives”). Among this new group’s members was Binyamin Ze’ev Kahane, Kahane’s youngest son.⁵⁸⁹

Even as Kach grappled with the fallout from Kahane’s assassination, however, the rabbi himself received a notable dose of posthumous good will. Although mainstream groups and public figures across the entire political spectrum in the U.S. and Israel mostly reiterated their

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid. In a letter written from Abu Kabir prison in Tel Aviv after his arrest, Ben Yekutiel—reflecting on the ongoing Gulf War—wrote that the potential for territorial compromise driven by the first Bush administration was “much more problematic and dangerous than Saddam [Hussein]’s ability to wipe out Israel.” Also behind bars after the CNN incident were David Axelrod (Ha’ivri) and Lenny Goldberg.

⁵⁸⁸ David Landau and Gil Sedan, “News Analysis: Kahane’s Ideas May Live On, But His Movement is Moribund,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, November 8, 1990.

⁵⁸⁹ Perliger and Pedahzur, *Jewish Terrorism*, 96.

condemnation of Kahane's views even as they deplored the violent nature of his death, his New York funeral was attended by representatives of major Jewish organizations, including the ADL's Abe Foxman. Kahane also received warm words in respected circles, particularly in the U.S. Rabbi Mark S. Golub, a founding editor of the prestigious American-Jewish journal *Sh'ma*, and the founder and host of the well-regarded cable show *L'Chayim*, eulogized Kahane on the program, sharing that while he "often disagreed with Meir Kahane, I liked him personally very much ... he was a man of passion and conviction"; Golub also accused the American-Jewish communal establishment and the Israeli political establishment of conspiring to silence the rabbi.⁵⁹⁰ Alan Dershowitz went even further, claiming that "[p]art of the blame [for the assassination] lies with those who wanted to censor [Kahane]," while noting his "admiration for his willingness to ask the hardest questions."⁵⁹¹ Rabbi Moshe Tendler, a professor at Yeshiva University and an esteemed expert on medical ethics and halacha, delivered the eulogy at Kahane's New York funeral and declared that "time has proven [Kahane's] wisdom."⁵⁹² American Jewish Committee president Sholom D. Comay, though not at the funeral, acknowledged his "considerable differences" with Kahane, but nonetheless urged that he "always be remembered for the slogan, 'Never Again.'"⁵⁹³ And Yoram Hazony, an editor at the *Jerusalem Post* who would not long after be hired by Netanyahu, reflected that while he had never adopted Kahanist ideology, he and his peers had, nonetheless, been transformed by

⁵⁹⁰ Mark S. Golub on L'Chayim, "Rabbi Kahane," *Jewish Broadcasting Service*, November 1990, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BI9PeQoa_2A. Accessed May 11, 2022.

⁵⁹¹ Wohlgelernter, "Kahane, Though Vilified."

⁵⁹² Ari L. Goldman, "Outpouring for Kahane: Pity or a New Respect?" *New York Times*, November 8, 1990.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*

Kahane. "Rabbi Kahane was the only Jewish leader who ever cared enough about our lives to actually come around and tell us what he thought we could do," Hazony wrote in the days after the assassination. He "helped us grow up into strong, Jewish men and women For us, it has come time to say a most painful, heartfelt farewell."⁵⁹⁴

Alongside those who believed that Kahane's movement would be laid to rest alongside its former leader, and those who—in focusing on his defense of Jews—whitewashed his legacy, there were some who warned about the pernicious and unpredictable effects of the ideology Kahane had left behind, above all in Israel. The president of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America, Rabbi Marc Angel, warned that the assassination could galvanize Kahanism; in a statement released after the killing, he said, "I believe it was Kierkegaard who said that when a tyrant dies, his rule ends; but when a martyr dies, his rule begins. An Arab assassin has now made a martyr of Rabbi Meir Kahane."⁵⁹⁵ And Ehud Sprinzak, argued that even if organized Kahanism withered, denied its lifeline of American funds, its impact on Israeli society was here to stay—as evinced by the increased permissiveness toward the idea of "transfer," which was now, Sprinzak noted, openly discussed in the Knesset. Kahane may have begun his Israeli political career on the margins, but by the 1980s, Sprinzak said, "the center had moved toward Kahane."⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁴ Yoram Hazony, "Farewell from a 'non-Kahanist,'" *Jerusalem Post*, November 8, 1990. The previous year, the formerly Labor-aligned *Post* had been bought by a major Canadian media outfit owned by Conrad Black. Shortly after, the paper's editorial line took a sharp rightward turn. Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 187.

⁵⁹⁵ Wohlgelernter, "Kahane, Though Vilified." Angel would later go on to co-found an organization geared at combating a rightward trend in American Orthodoxy. Gary Rosenblatt, *New York Jewish Week*, May 2, 2008.

⁵⁹⁶ John Kifner, "In Israel, Kahane's Ideas Have Taken On A Life of Their Own," *New York Times*, November 11, 1990.

The new world

As much as Kahane's bereft followers believed in the continued need for far-right protest movements, the parallel ongoing rightward march of Israeli politics and the growing strength of the institutional American-Jewish far right suggested otherwise. Certainly, the latter had been considerably bolstered—and shaped—by the dominance of the far right in successive U.S. and Israeli governments. And far from undermining the prominence of the American-Jewish far right, in particular neoconservatives, the seismic changes in the geopolitical outlook as the Soviet Union declined injected the movement with new life, as well as serving as a crucible in which far-right commentators and activists could make ever-more sweeping claims about the interconnectedness of the U.S. and Israel's national security. Now, faced with a seemingly unipolar world that was also rapidly restructuring and, in places, splintering as new nation-states formed and new regimes coalesced in the wake of the Soviet collapse, the American-Jewish far right could point to destabilization in the Middle East—not least due to the 1989 Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan—as the central menace that threatened the international order. Within this framework, it was fairly straightforward to portray Palestinian resistance—armed and not—as part of a larger project to unmake the so-called Western liberal order, which discursively put Palestinian militant groups in the same category as the soon-to-emerge Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and which consequently framed Israel as uniquely well-placed to both assess and counter that threat. This analysis both affirmed the narrative Netanyahu had been pushing earlier in the 1980s, while foreshadowing his coming leadership.

For the policy hawks at JINSA, the new moment demanded an expanded foreign policy advocacy, focusing less on the Soviets (and proxies) and their ties with the PLO, and more on advising on and monitoring the wider Middle East, East Asia, and beyond (with the PLO remaining, of course, part of that global portrait of political Islam).⁵⁹⁷ Yet JINSA's raison d'être was unchanged, with the think tank insisting that Israel remained, even in a post-Soviet world, "a strategic and tactical ally of the United States in and near the Middle East."⁵⁹⁸

For the neoconservative commentariat, meanwhile, who continued to congregate in the pages of *Commentary*, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict maintained its place as the bellwether for the wider "clash of civilizations." Thus did the magazine's writers lament the "mercilessness" and "violences of the Arab world"; the "heightening guilt and self-laceration" of Israeli liberals; and growing liberal support for the Palestinian cause, and what that signified for the political fortunes of Jews, the U.S., Israel, and the Western world.⁵⁹⁹ The impact of the first intifada on American-Jewish opinion was a particular source of anxiety: *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz in early 1989 decried how the "barbarically brilliant" defining imagery of the first intifada—young Palestinians facing off against Israeli tanks armed with little more than stones—had achieved its "intended result of shifting the balance of sympathy among liberals decisively to the side of the Palestinians and against Israelis"; in the same article, he labeled as antisemitic the

⁵⁹⁷ JINSA, "Print Newsletter Archive," https://web.archive.org/web/20210211064450/https://jinsa.org/archive_page/print-newsletter-archive/, accessed May 4, 2022.

⁵⁹⁸ Eugene V. Rostow, "Strengthening the Bonds: The American Commitment to Israel," *JINSA: Security Affairs* June 1992, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150926235010/http://www.jinsa.org/files/newsletter-archive/1992/jun1992.pdf>.

⁵⁹⁹ David Pryce-Jones, "Self-Determination, Arab Style," *Commentary* 87, no. 1 (January 1, 1989), 42, <https://www.commentary.org/articles/pryce-jones/self-determination-arab-style/>; Ruth Wisse, "Jewish Guilt and Israeli Writers," *Commentary* 87, no. 1 (January 1, 1989), 28, <https://www.commentary.org/articles/ruth-wisse/jewish-guilt-and-israeli-writers/>.

idea that the occupation was a violation of international law, and called out the “shame and self-disgust” of American Jews who had begun questioning Israel’s military actions.⁶⁰⁰ Equally, American Jews’ stubborn liberalism in domestic affairs—they had, once again, overwhelmingly voted for the Democrats in the 1988 election that brought George H.W. Bush to power—led Milton Himmelfarb, writing in the wake of that election, to archly categorize them as “diehard conservatives” for their “old attachments and habits” (in this case, liberalism). Invoking the burgeoning right-wing argument that the Democrats were becoming soft on antisemitism, Himmelfarb expressed his hope that when American Jews did eventually desert the party, it wouldn’t be as a result of “grievous affliction.”⁶⁰¹

In the philanthropic arena, meanwhile, the boom in donor-advised giving that had commenced in the early 1980s—coinciding with the start of the Reagan years—continued, helping to fuel an expanding pipeline of cash from American-Jewish private family foundations to settlement projects in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. At the center of this funding network was Irving Moskowitz, the casino and bingo billionaire, who was particularly devoted to projects that sought the Judaization of East Jerusalem. The impact of his, and his peers’, donations in this arena would accelerate considerably after a new, far-right Israeli government was sworn in in 1990 following the collapse of the current coalition.⁶⁰² Yet an upscale New York dinner in June 1989, held in honor of Jerusalem Day, the annual celebration marking Israel’s occupation of East

⁶⁰⁰ Norman Podhoretz, “Israel: A Lamentation From the Future,” *Commentary* 87, no 3 (March 1, 1989), 19-21, <https://www.commentary.org/articles/norman-podhoretz/israel-a-lamentation-from-the-future/>.

⁶⁰¹ Milton Himmelfarb, “American Jews: Diehard Conservatives,” *Commentary* 87, no. 4 (April 1, 1989), 44, 49, <https://www.commentary.org/articles/milton-himmelfarb-2/american-jews-diehard-conservatives/>.

⁶⁰² Ami Pedahzur calls Irving Moskowitz “the person most responsible for the success of” Ateret Cohanim and Elad, the two private groups leading the charge to Judaize East Jerusalem. Pedahzur, *Triumph of Israel’s Radical Right*, 86.

Jerusalem (considered the “reunification” of the city), was a harbinger of things to come. Hosted by the American Friends of Ateret Cohanim (AFAC) the two hundred and fifty-dollar-a-head banquet, which raised well over two million dollars, was attended by then-New York City Mayor Ed Koch; Malcolm Hoenlein, the executive director of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (COP), who emceed the event; and Ariel Sharon, who had kept his Israeli government post as industry and trade minister following the 1988 election. Sharon, who was in New York to try and drum up opposition to a short-lived Israeli peace initiative pushed by Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, was the keynote speaker at the AFAC gala, and rather aptly so: he had recently become a neighbor-of-sorts to Ateret Cohanim, having moved, in late 1987, into a new home he had purchased in the center of the Muslim Quarter in Jerusalem’s Old City, not far from the Ateret Cohanim Yeshiva.⁶⁰³ As will be discussed below, Sharon would become a central player in the coming early 1990s boom in Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem, facilitating the deployment of Moskowitz’s donations—and Israeli and American taxpayer money—throughout the city’s Palestinian neighborhoods.

The American-Jewish far-right’s accumulating successes were visible not only in the growing clout of its own organizations and leaders, but also in its creeping annexation of mainstream American-Jewish institutions. The “long-term shift in America’s political mood” that began with Reagan’s election would, as the 1980s drew to a close, drag much of the American-Jewish

⁶⁰³ Andrew Silow Carroll, “Sharon Seeks American Jewish Support for His Opposition to Peace Plan,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, June 5, 1989; Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 115. Despite the central role of Hoenlein in the AFAC dinner, Sharon reportedly received a less friendly reception at a COP event he attended the following day: members balked at the idea they should reject the peace plan, which their organization had endorsed. Hoenlein said he had attended the AFAC dinner in a “personal capacity,” claiming Ateret Cohanim “focuses only on establishing amiable relations with its Arab neighbors.” Carroll, “Sharon Seeks.”

establishment—attached as it was to the American political project and accompanying culture—along with it.⁶⁰⁴ Readily apparent in both leadership changes and the shifting priorities of major American-Jewish establishment institutions in the late 1980s to mid-1990s, these developments were both a continuation of some of the increased hawkishness around Israel-Palestine that had emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly on the part of the ADL and AIPAC (see previous chapter), and part of a longer-term adjustment to the dominance of the Israeli far right and the aforementioned realignment of U.S. politics.

The Zionist Organization of America, for example, which in 1986 appointed as president future American Friends of Likud treasurer Milton S. Shapiro, had come under increasingly right-wing leadership over the past two decades, and was now essentially a Likud-aligned outfit.⁶⁰⁵ At its annual gala in 1989, an invited speaker labeled American Jews who supported a

⁶⁰⁴ J. J. Goldberg, *Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment* (Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1996), 200. Robert Friedman may have overplayed his hand when, in the early 1990s, he referred to AIPAC, the ADL, and the COP as “the American Jewish establishment’s powerful neoconservative trinity.” Nonetheless, there is no denying that each had leaders—Larry Weinberg, Abe Foxman, and Malcolm Hoenlein, respectively—firmly aligned with, or sympathetic to aspects of, neoconservatism. Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 220. The American Jewish Committee, for its part, continued to publish *Commentary* until 2007—long after the magazine’s evolution into a staple of the neoconservative movement. Gabrielle Birkner, “Commentary, American Jewish Committee Separate,” *The New York Sun*, December 21, 2006, <https://www.nysun.com/article/new-york-commentary-american-jewish-committee-separate>.

⁶⁰⁵ Shapiro would also go on to serve as president of the Jewish National Fund USA. The ZOA’s then-Manhattan branch president, Ken Kellner, attended AFAC’s 1990 fundraising dinner. Jewish National Fund, “The Milton and Beatrice Shapiro JNF USA Scholarship Fund,” 2020, accessed April 28, 2022, <http://support.jnf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=miltonshapiroscholarship>; Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 117. The ZOA’s rightward lurch by no means commenced under Shapiro; as early as 1976, then-ZOA president Joseph P. Sternstein, the former executive director of JNF USA, joined other right-wing American Jews in excoriating members of the left-wing Jewish group Breira for meeting with PLO-linked Palestinians; the heads of Breira, Sternstein said, were acting as “the Jewish spokesmen of the PLO.” Cited in Marla Brettschneider, *Cornerstones of Peace: Jewish Identity Politics and Democratic Theory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 44. Sternstein’s successor and Shapiro’s predecessor, Ivan J. Novick, expressed his approval of Norman Podhoretz in a 1982 letter to the *New York Review of Books*, while calling out “those American Jews who have been adding their own special note to the whining chorus of anti-Israel columnists and State Department Arabists.” Ivan J. Novick, “Dissent and Israel: An Exchange,” *New York Review of Books* 24, no. 18 (November 18, 1982), <https://www.nybooks.com/issues/1982/11/18/>.

land-for-peace deal “assimilated court Jews, Vichy Jews, *galut* Jews, kapos, quislings,” and said they could have been part of “the notorious *Judenrat*.”⁶⁰⁶ The same year, Netanyahu, back in the U.S. as Israel’s deputy foreign minister, chose ZOA members as his audience for an ominous speech that compared Israel, in being asked to give up land, to Czechoslovakia in 1938, and warned that if the Jewish state did not flourish, its only other path was destruction.⁶⁰⁷

AIPAC, meanwhile, continued not only its ascent but also its increasing alignment with both the American and Israeli right.⁶⁰⁸ The confluence of American and Israeli political developments in the 1980s had, in many ways, provided the ideal environment for AIPAC to thrive even as it became increasingly hardline, despite aspiring to—and achieving—the mantle of partisanship. Having devolved, during that decade, into compiling blacklists of journalists, professors, activists, and politicians whom it deemed to be spreading anti-Israel/pro-Arab “propaganda”—a development largely provoked by Israel’s tumble in the court of opinion following the 1982 Lebanon War—the lobby group also sought to increasingly associate criticism of Israel with antisemitism, while attempting to sideline dissenting opinions within the American-Jewish community.⁶⁰⁹ Indeed, between the surging power of the American New Right and the rise of neoconservatism; the explosion in American-Jewish philanthropy and in particular

⁶⁰⁶ Ofira Seliktar, *Divided We Stand: American Jews, Israel, and the Peace Process* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 97; Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 222. The speaker, Mordecai Hacohen, had been a Betar leader in Vienna before World War II, and later served in the Israeli foreign ministry. Mordecai Hacohen, *Homeland: From Clandestine Immigration to Israeli Independence* (New York City, NY: Beaufort Books, 2008), 33, 53, 107.

⁶⁰⁷ Susan Birnbaum, “Netanyahu Paints Picture of Israel Poised on Brink of Greatness, Danger,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, May 2, 1989.

⁶⁰⁸ There is no doubt that AIPAC’s influence—and operating budget—grew significantly in the 1980s; nonetheless, it bears mentioning J. J. Goldberg’s assessment that the “myth” of AIPAC’s ruthless effectiveness also crystallized during this period—helped along, not least, by AIPAC’s own narration of its fortunes during this decade. Goldberg, *Jewish Power*, 199; Waxman, *Trouble in the Tribe*, 156-7.

⁶⁰⁹ Kaplan, *Our American Israel*, 159-61, 165; Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 224.

the influence of conservative mega-donors; and the deepening rightward trend in Israeli politics, AIPAC's march to the right was all but unavoidable. As the journalist J.J. Goldberg has noted, AIPAC in those years was governed by "a tiny coterie of deeply conservative, publicity-shy multimillionaires," led by Larry Weinberg, a registered Democrat who became close friends with Begin and a strong supporter of Reagan.⁶¹⁰ The right-wing politics of the so-called "officers group" did far more to dictate AIPAC's outlook than did the relative liberalism of the executive director Weinberg had appointed in 1980, Thomas Dine. For his part, however, Dine—whose occasional efforts to resist the conservatism of his de facto bosses would lead to his ouster in the early 1990s—had a transformative impact on AIPAC's budget and operations, turning it into the "battleship AIPAC" that became renowned for its outsize presence on Capitol Hill.⁶¹¹ And it was under Dine that AIPAC evolved from "a small agency...into an independent mass-membership powerhouse run by its wealthiest donors."⁶¹²

As it turned out, AIPAC's growing clout and increasing pugilism as the 1980s ended, honed by over a decade of trying to maintain the support of largely liberal U.S. Jews for an evermore right-wing Israeli government, put it in good stead—in some ways—to face the coming decade in Israeli politics. Yet the chaos of Israel's political scene in the 1990s—with the electorate swinging sharply from Likud to Labor and back again—also proved trying for a lobbying outfit that was, on the one hand, steadily edging toward neoconservatism, while cleaving to a singular article of faith—support for the state and government of Israel, no matter what—on the other. For AIPAC and the wider American-Jewish far right, as well as their Israeli

⁶¹⁰ Goldberg, *Jewish Power*, 202.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 200-1.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, 201.

counterparts, it was their inability to make peace with making peace that brought them to new heights of prominence and influence.

War on peace

Back in Israel, it did not take long for the ideologically incompatible governing coalition, once faced with the prospect of a land-for-peace deal, to implode. In late 1989, a peace plan proposed by U.S. Secretary of State James Baker sparked an unresolvable disagreement between Shamir and Peres, leading the latter to attempt to form a narrow left-wing government, only to fail—in what Rabin, who would replace Peres as party leader in 1992, termed “the stinking trick.”⁶¹³ The coalition duly collapsed; and Peres, unable to form a new government, was forced to pass the baton to Shamir, who assembled Israel’s most far-right government yet. Joining Likud in the narrow coalition, which was sworn in in July 1990, were Tehiya, Moledet, and Tzomet, as well as the three major Haredi parties: Agudat Yisrael, Degel HaTorah, and Shas.

Further peace proposals would soon upset this government, too, but not before the reshuffling of ministerial responsibilities under Shamir. The coalition’s newfound freedom from having to share power with ideological opponents instantly and drastically advanced the fortunes of the far-right settlement movement: Sharon, freshly in charge of the Ministry of Housing and Construction, moved Gush Emunim personnel into his office while immediately ramping up settlement construction. He also briskly allotted millions of dollars of government money to Elad, a far-right settler group that had been founded the previous decade and which primarily operated in East Jerusalem, and Ateret Cohanim, significantly boosting an already abundant

⁶¹³ Ilan Kfir, “Hakhra’ah Achshav” [“Decision Now”], *HaHadashot*, May 13, 1990.

transatlantic slush fund and allowing both groups to accelerate their property purchases—facilitated, too, by the 1950 Absentees’ Property Law.⁶¹⁴ This would, the following year, lead to the first Elad-sponsored settler takeover of a Palestinian home in Silwan, the opening shot in an assiduous program of displacement that continues to this day.

Another American-Jewish-backed outfit in Jerusalem, meanwhile, was also determined to make its mark on the city—and, in the fall of 1990, helped provoke a burst of violence on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif that killed seventeen Palestinians and left over a hundred more wounded, along with around two dozen Israelis, including police. The incident ignited when the Temple Mount Faithful, having been prevented by police from laying the cornerstone of the proposed Third Temple during the previous year’s Sukkot holiday, announced their intention to try again.⁶¹⁵ The declaration prompted crowds of Palestinians to ascend the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif on October 8, 1990, the date of the planned Temple Mount Faithful action; an Israeli police officer deployed tear gas, some Palestinians retaliated by throwing stones, and, after a brief stand-off, the police responded with live ammunition. The Israeli government immediately accused Palestinians of orchestrating the entire event in order to win sympathy; Netanyahu, taking once more to the American airwaves, blamed PLO head Yasser Arafat for the

⁶¹⁴ The law allowed the Israeli state to requisition property belonging to anyone who was expelled from, fled, or left the country on or after November 29, 1947, the date the UN adopted its Partition Plan for Palestine.

⁶¹⁵ “Jews Pray for Temple Restoration on Site that Islam Now Dominates,” *Deseret News*, November 5, 1989, <https://www.deseret.com/1989/11/5/18830844/jews-pray-for-temple-restoration-on-site-that-islam-now-dominates>. The group’s decision to begin trying to act on their long-nurtured plans to rebuild the Third Temple was, apparently, in response to the intifada. Gershon Salomon, “The Qumran Temple Scroll and its Idealistic Temple,” *Voice of the Temple Mount Faithful* (Summer 2004), 33, <https://templemountfaithful.org/newsletters/5764-2004.pdf>. Accessed May 13, 2022.

massacre.⁶¹⁶ Conservative American-Jewish voices followed suit: AIPAC released a statement accusing Palestinians of a “premeditated” assault on Jews; a COP statement used almost identical language; and, in *Commentary*, David Bar-Illan, an editor at the *Jerusalem Post*, compared blaming the Israeli police for the killings to Holocaust denial.⁶¹⁷ Nine months later, an investigation led by an Israeli judge deemed the Israeli police responsible for the violence.⁶¹⁸

The incident, though not an isolated one, was the most lethal day Jerusalem had seen since the Six-Day War. And although it had been provoked by what was considered, even within the far-right firmament, a relatively fringe group, the fallout demonstrated the ability of Jerusalem’s far-right settler groups and interests, generously sponsored by American-Jewish backers, to wreak havoc in the city, each time risking a wider conflagration. Indeed, it would not be the last time this pattern played out—nor that major American-Jewish organizations would downplay both the actions of far-right Israeli rabble-rousers, and of Israeli security forces responding to the flare-ups caused by the provocations of the former.

Yet the transnational Jewish far right—including the Israeli government—was about to have far greater challenges on its hands. Although Rabin’s 1989 peace proposal, and the separate plan tabled by Baker later that year, had been dashed on the rocks of Shamir’s intransigence regarding territorial compromise as well as by the ongoing intifada, the Bush administration

⁶¹⁶ “Dam v’Esh BaHar-HaBayit” [“Blood and Fire on the Temple Mount”], *Maariv*, October 9, 1990; Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 130.

⁶¹⁷ David Bar-Illan, “‘60 Minutes’ & the Temple Mount,” *Commentary* 91, no. 2 (February 1991), 20. In 1992, Bar-Illan became the editor-in-chief of the *Jerusalem Post*. He had previously been a speechwriter for Netanyahu, and in 1996, after being elected prime minister, Netanyahu appointed him his chief spokesperson. Thomas J. Lueck, “David Bar-Illan, Ex-Israeli Aide, Dies at 73,” *New York Times*, November 5, 2003; Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 133.

⁶¹⁸ Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 132; “Riots Erupt on Temple Mount, Leaving at Least 19 Arabs Dead,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 9, 1990; Joel Brinkley, “Judge Says Police Provoked Clash That Killed 17 Arabs in Jerusalem,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1991.

continued its efforts to drive forward Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. The first fruits came with a peace conference held in Madrid in late 1991, which had almost been derailed by Israel's request for a multi-billion-dollar loan guarantee from the U.S. in order to help it absorb hundreds of thousands of new immigrants from the soon-to-be-dissolved Soviet Union.⁶¹⁹ Shamir agreed to the conference, but within months of the gathering in Madrid, the government's three most far-right parties—Tehiya, Moledet, and Tzomet—had pulled out of the coalition in protest at Israel's participation in the conference and the talks that resulted.⁶²⁰ And worse was to come: although Shamir and Likud managed to hang onto power until the 1992 elections, the party lost out to Labor in that vote, sending Likud out of the governing coalition for the first time in fifteen years. The actual exchange of Knesset seats was more modest than that suggested by the “earthquake” designation the election results immediately received—Likud's share went from 40 seats down to 32, while Labor gained five seats, going from 39 to 44—but the outcome indeed gave the appearance, after decades of Likud dominance, of a sea change in Israeli politics.⁶²¹ Leon Hadar, a conservative Israeli journalist and researcher, declared the result the birth of the “Third Israeli Republic,” succeeding the “Second Israeli Republic” (1977-1992) that had been characterized by Likud dominance and the growing power of religious and nationalist forces. (The “First Israeli Republic” had likewise been defined by the Labor/Socialist-Zionist hegemony, and what Hadar

⁶¹⁹ The U.S. wanted to condition the loan on Israel reining in its settlement program, including a guarantee not to settle Soviet immigrants in the occupied territories. Shamir, backed by Sharon, refused; distribution of the loan finally began in 1992, after the swearing-in of the Labor government.

⁶²⁰ Shortly after being voted out of government, Shamir admitted to a reporter that his aim was to let the peace talks shuffle along indefinitely, while continuing to drive Israel's ballooning settlement project. Yosef Harif, “Only One or Two of My Would-Be Successors Are Satisfactory,” *Maariv*, June 26, 1992.

⁶²¹ The front page of Israeli Daily *Hadashot* the morning after the election, for example, led with the headline “Reida Adama” [“Earthquake”], over photographs of Rabin and of jubilant Labor supporters celebrating the result. *Hadashot*, June 24, 1992.

classed as a “moderate and humanist Zionist ethos.”)⁶²² The significance of Likud’s defeat arose from several facts: that polling before the election campaign began suggested the party would win decisively; that a majority of the new Israelis arriving from the former Soviet Union were inclined to align with Likud and its stature as the country’s foremost enemy of socialism; and that Likud had, simply, been enjoying a long-standing reign in Israeli politics.⁶²³ Likud’s dominance was itself understood as a reflection of an Israeli public increasingly taking a hard line on matters of security, and of a right-wing Zionism whose religious and secular wings were becoming less segregated.⁶²⁴

Now, for the first time in fifteen years, that dominance appeared in real doubt—and without a crystal ball to see that Likud’s time would rapidly come again, the back-to-back of the Madrid conference and electoral defeat galvanized the transnational Jewish far right. In Israel, while the smaller parties attempted to bring down the government in response to Madrid, a hawkish faction in Likud—led by Sharon—threatened rebellion, although eventually backed down.⁶²⁵ (Sharon, however, had been conscientiously attempting to upend the talks that paved the way for the conference, frequently announcing new settlements to coincide with Baker’s visits to Israel.)⁶²⁶ Right-wing settlers threatened the formation of a shadow government, whose members would include Netanyahu, Benny Begin, Ariel Sharon, and Gush Emunim co-founder

⁶²² Leon T. Hadar, “The 1992 Electoral Earthquake and the Fall of the ‘Second Israeli Republic,’” *Middle East Journal* 46, no. 4 (Autumn 1992), 594-5.

⁶²³ Sammy Smooha and Don Peretz, “Israel’s 1992 Elections: Are They Critical?” *Middle East Journal* 47, no. 3 (Summer 1993), 445-8.

⁶²⁴ Hadar, “1992 Electoral Earthquake,” 602.

⁶²⁵ David Landau, “Shamir Government Intact for Now, But Future Unclear Once Talks Begin,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 22, 1991.

⁶²⁶ Landau, *Arik*, 263.

and former National Religious Party Knesset member Haim Druckman, in order to keep up the construction of new homes in the occupied territories.⁶²⁷ As soon as the results of the 1992 election were confirmed, Sharon also dispatched hundreds of families to occupy then-empty settlement homes before Rabin could intervene—a maneuver facilitated, as Ami Pedahzur has observed, by the relationships he'd formed with the settler movement over the past few years while in office.⁶²⁸ And, ever aware of the importance of marshaling American-Jewish support, Likud also dispatched two of its Knesset members to the U.S. to plead their case before Jewish groups there, stressing above all the importance of Israel keeping the occupied territories and continuing to settle Jews in them.⁶²⁹

The extra-parliamentary far right, meanwhile, decided on a show of strength, organizing a rally in Tel Aviv days ahead of the conference, where a predominantly male crowd, many armed, waved Kach flags, as well as those of Tzomet and Moledet. Chants of “Death to Arabs” could be heard among attendees, who numbered between 50- and 80,000. Some of the protesters had joined in response to the death of Rachel Drouk, an Israeli settler who had been on a bus en route to the demonstration when gunmen belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine opened fire on it, killing Drouk and the bus driver.⁶³⁰ An editorial published that September in

⁶²⁷ Gil Sedan, “Right Wing Plans Shadow Government to Help Promote Settlement Activity,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, August 17, 1992.

⁶²⁸ Pedahzur, *Triumph of the Israeli Radical Right*, 98.

⁶²⁹ David Friedman and Howard Rosenberg, “Israel Needs to Retain Territories, Likud Politicians Tell U.S. Groups,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 29, 1991.

⁶³⁰ “‘Mavet LaAravim’ BaHafganat Yamin” [“‘Death to Arabs’ at Right-Wing Demonstration”], *Hadashot*, October 29, 1991; Hugh Orgel, “2 Rallies in Tel Aviv Highlight Israeli Divide Over Peace Talks,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 30, 1991; “Harugei HaPigua: Em L’-7, Av L’-4” [“Dead in the Terror Attack: A Mother of 7 and a Father of 4”], *Hadashot*, October 29, 1991. The attack led to the first woman-founded settlement in the occupied West Bank, Rechalim, named after Drouk, Rachel Weiss, another Israeli settler killed in a Palestinian attack, and Rachel, the biblical matriarch. El-Or and Aran, “Giving Birth to a Settlement,” 60.

Nekuda, the main religious settler newspaper, announced that the Rabin government “must pass from the earth,” a call that was echoed elsewhere in the religious-Zionist media.⁶³¹

In the U.S., meanwhile, a coalition of right-wing Jewish groups called on Shamir to stick to his guns on territorial compromise, under the slogan “peace for peace” (which was also the slogan of the far-right demonstration that took place in Tel Aviv). Among the groups banding together were the mostly moribund Betar USA, which for the past several years had been trying to resuscitate itself through its college student offshoot, Tagar; the American branch of Tehiya; and the Zionist Organization of America’s flagship Manhattan branch.⁶³² The neoconservative far right hit similar notes: in a *Commentary* editorial, Norman Podhoretz slammed the Bush administration’s efforts to bring Israel to the negotiating table, and above all the idea that Israel should withdraw from the occupied territories; JINSA, meanwhile, cautiously welcomed the idea of peace talks but balked at the prospect of Israeli concessions, including the return of land and a settlement freeze.⁶³³ Here, as in the past, the conservative wing of American Jewry found itself having to walk a tightrope between supporting the Israeli government at all times, and sticking to its principles on security, territory, and rejecting any semblance of genuine accommodation toward Palestinians—a tightrope that had become considerably narrower with the regime change

⁶³¹ Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar, *Lords of the Land: The War Over Israel’s Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967-2007*, tr. Vivian Eden (New York, NY: Nation Books, 2007), 130.

⁶³² Larry Yudelson, “Right-wing Groups Form Coalition Backing Shamir on ‘Peace for Peace,’” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 31, 1991. Tagar, founded in 1983, was predominantly active on college campuses; like the ADL and AIPAC, it created blacklists of and files on “pro-PLO, anti-Zionist, anti-Jewish speakers” and told members to “be on your guard” if any of them visited their campuses. “New Zionist Student Activist Movement Founded,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, March 8, 1983; Tagar Zionist Student Activist Movement, list of speakers, undated (prob. 19803), Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 Bet/5.

⁶³³ Norman Podhoretz, “America and Israel: An Ominous Change,” *Commentary* 93, no. 1 (January 1992), 21-25; “Editorial,” *JINSA: Security Affairs*, July-August 1992, 2, accessed May 20, 1992, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150927042553/http://www.jinsa.org/files/newsletter-archive/1992/jul-aug1992.pdf>.

in Israel. That balance had been somewhat easier to strike during the decades of successive Likud rule, but with Rabin's electoral victory, those groups who had fully thrown their weight behind Shamir were suddenly faced with the prospect of having to either perform a rapid volte-face, or justify an end to decades of a de facto policy of backing Israel and its leadership, no matter what. For AIPAC and the COP in particular, the results of the 1992 election proved awkward: left-leaning newspapers in Israel reported on or called for potential changes in the organizations' leadership, pointing to a perception that Tom Dine and Malcolm Hoenlein alike had cleaved too close to the Likud party line.⁶³⁴ The Israeli press further reported that the Rabin government was "target[ing] Dine and Hoenlein because of their closeness to the previous Shamir government"; while Jewish groups roundly rejected that characterization, there was an acknowledgement that Rabin not only felt there was less need for the pro-Israel lobby to intercede on his behalf with Congress, but that their involvement was a potential obstacle.⁶³⁵ And Rabin's wishes aside, with his election came further interventions by AIPAC's "officers group." Their distrust of the new Israeli prime minister—and of U.S. President Bill Clinton, who was elected in November 1992—drove them to keep tight control over the organization and led to their firing, the following year, of Dine. He was, by their standards, too independent and too liberal to be trusted in a moment when the Israeli government had shifted leftward—and although AIPAC's liberal wing prevailed in securing Dine's successor, his tenure would be short-lived.⁶³⁶ This would also, as we shall see, be the last time that the lobby group's right-wing

⁶³⁴ David Landau, "Repairing Relations With U.S. is at the Top of Rabin's Agenda," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, July 1, 1992.

⁶³⁵ Cynthia Mann, "Organized American Jewry Shifting in Wake of Rabin Victory in Israel," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, July 28, 1992.

⁶³⁶ Goldberg, *Jewish Power*, 225-6.

vanguard came runner-up in deciding who would lead the organization. And yet, as their grip on AIPAC temporarily loosened, the members of the “officers group” were about to see their worst fears about Rabin realized.⁶³⁷

King Bibi

Netanyahu, meanwhile, continued to burnish his reputation as an astute wielder of *hasbara* and as the darling of the American-Jewish far right throughout the early 1990s, while also building his political power base in Israel. After another series of high-profile U.S. television appearances during the Gulf War in early 1991 that relegated Netanyahu’s furious boss, Foreign Minister David Levy, to the background, Shamir began to understand Netanyahu’s value as a diplomat and propagandist.⁶³⁸ He duly took his deputy foreign minister to Madrid that October, a sign, according to an Israeli diplomat who also took part in the conference, that Shamir “wanted *hasbara*, not diplomacy.”⁶³⁹ The whirlwind of press conferences and media scrimmages

⁶³⁷ Dine’s replacement, Neal Sher, was up against Howard Kohr, a staunch conservative and the officers’ group’s pick, for the role. According to J. J. Goldberg, Sher—who was moving over from heading up the Office of Special Investigations Bureau at the Department of Justice (which tracked down Nazis in the U.S.)—was eventually appointed because enough Democrats in AIPAC jumped into action to block Kohr’s progress, motivated as they were by the Rabin and Clinton electoral victories. Goldberg, *Jewish Power*, 226.

⁶³⁸ Caspit, *Netanyahu Years*, 90. Netanyahu’s defining news appearance during the Gulf War was an interview with CNN’s Israel correspondent, Linda Scherzer, which was interrupted by air raid sirens warning of possible incoming SCUD missiles. Both interviewee and host donned their gas masks and continued their conversation; Netanyahu, adopting a folksy American affect, called it the “darnedest way to conduct an interview,” before pointing out that it illustrated well the threat Israel was facing. “Linda Scherzer CNN Resume Video,” *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWnu8O7yHa8>. Accessed May 20, 2022.

⁶³⁹ Cited in Pfeffer, *Bibi*, 182.

Netanyahu organized in Madrid met with Shamir's approval, while further enraging Levy; upon Netanyahu's return to Israel, he was transferred to the Prime Minister's Office.⁶⁴⁰

From there, Netanyahu moved to take advantage of his next opening: Likud's loss in the 1992 elections and, with it, the search for the party's new leader. Moshe Arens, Netanyahu's longtime mentor and the assumed successor to Shamir, instead announced his departure from politics. Netanyahu duly declared his candidacy for party leadership, lining up key Likud allies—including his ultra-hawkish aide, Avigdor Liberman, a former Kach activist who had immigrated from the Soviet Union in the 1970s; and Tzachi HaNegbi, son of Geulah Cohen—and amassing American funds and advisers.⁶⁴¹ Netanyahu's key donor at that time was Ronald Lauder, a former Reagan ambassador and heir to the Estée Lauder family fortune, although he also received financial support from Moskowitz and Reuben Mattus, the latter of whom had also helped fund Kach's electoral campaigns (see previous chapter).⁶⁴² Netanyahu's advisory team, meanwhile, included the Americans Dore Gold, who had been part of the Israeli delegation with Netanyahu at the Madrid conference, and Yoram Hazony, who also represented Israel in Madrid, and whom Netanyahu poached from the *Jerusalem Post*—where Hazony had published his emotional Kahane eulogy—to serve as his “special assistant.”⁶⁴³ The appointment of Hazony, who had lived in the Gush Emunim-founded settlement of Eli since the end of the 1980s, was an early indicator of the American-Israeli neoconservative nexus that would come to dominate the transnational Jewish far right, and which had Netanyahu at its center. An Ivy League graduate

⁶⁴⁰ Shamir, *Summing Up*, 191; Caspit, *Netanyahu Years*, 94.

⁶⁴¹ Caspit, *Netanyahu Years*, 96, 98.

⁶⁴² Pedahzur, *Triumph of the Israeli Radical Right*, 111.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, 113; Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 192.

and right-wing student activist who, as mentioned above, found Kahane an inspirational figure even as he disagreed with the late rabbi's approach, Hazony provided a nascent Israeli model of the kind of conservative institution-building, and grooming of future leaders to replace the ostensibly left-wing "elites," that neoconservatives had been pioneering in the U.S. for decades.⁶⁴⁴ In 1991, Hazony founded the Israeli Academy of Liberal Arts, a Jerusalem-based summer school aimed at American college students, with a program based around teaching Judaism alongside the Western canon.⁶⁴⁵ In a few years' time, the academy would be superseded by the Shalem Center, a neoconservative think tank that was able to open in no small part due to a substantial donation from Lauder.⁶⁴⁶

Kitted out with his transnational funding operation and "brain trust," Netanyahu swept to victory in the March 1993 Likud primaries, becoming party head, leader of the opposition, and, for the youthful supporters thronging his victory party, "King of Israel."⁶⁴⁷ It had been a stratospheric rise from those early days in New York, and one significantly powered by his relationships with, and impact on, like-minded American Jews. Netanyahu's ascension also, as the journalist Anshel Pfeffer notes in his biography, overturned a significant historical shadow, wherein "the son of Benzion Netanyahu, who forty-five years earlier had been ostracized by the Revisionist leadership, was now leader of the movement."⁶⁴⁸ It was a moment of personal

⁶⁴⁴ While an undergraduate at Princeton, Hazony founded *The Tory*, a student newspaper with a neoconservative editorial line. Irving Kristol provided funding. Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 180. See also Pedahzur, *Triumph of Israel's Radical Right*, 112.

⁶⁴⁵ Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 175.

⁶⁴⁶ Yoram Hazony, "Israeli Government Approves Establishment of Shalem College," *JerusalemLetters.com*, January 14, 2013, <https://jerusalemletters.com/israeli-government-approves-establishment-of-shalem-college/>.

⁶⁴⁷ Pfeffer, *Bibi*, 190.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

triumph, as well as a testament to the relatively unbroken trailing roots of the earliest leaders of far-right Zionism, even as the institutions they founded faded and were replaced by new organizations better-equipped to maneuver in a post-Cold War world.

Even as “King Bibi” ascended to the Likud throne, however, the setbacks for the wider transnational Jewish far right continued—and the movement would, within months of Netanyahu’s victory, face its most existential threat so far.

‘A foreign body’

If Rabin’s election had given the transnational Jewish far right a shot in the arm, the August 1993 revelation of the direct Israel-PLO negotiations, and the signing of the first Oslo Accord by Rabin and PLO head Yasser Arafat in Washington the following month, sent it into overdrive.⁶⁴⁹ The prospect of territorial concessions negotiated by an ostensibly liberal government was, for the far right, “the big one”—the doomsday scenario that would bring untold catastrophe if drastic measures weren’t taken to stop it. And indeed, as it turned out, American- and Israeli-Jewish right-wing extremists would stop at nothing in order to try and derail the peace process as negotiations continued, and further agreements were struck, over the coming two years.

Even before two devastating acts of violence effectively destroyed the Oslo process, far-right Israeli and American-Jewish factions, believing they were seeing their dream of a “Greater Israel” disappear, began mobilizing in opposition to both the negotiations and the government carrying them out. In Israel, new extra-parliamentary far-right settler groups popped up,

⁶⁴⁹ The Oslo I Accord led to the formation of the Palestinian Authority, led by Mahmoud Abbas, and set out a timeline for the withdrawal of the Israeli military from the Gaza Strip and Jericho in the occupied West Bank. The proposal was then for the PA to self-administer the territories under its control, although in reality Israeli retained the right to make military incursions into these areas.

inheriting the mantle of direct action that had somewhat fallen by the wayside as the first generation of such groups, which had emerged with the start of the occupation, institutionalized (see ch. 3). Chief among these was Zo Artzeinu (“This is Our Land”), a protest group founded at the end of 1993 by Moshe Feiglin, an Israeli entrepreneur, and Shmuel Sackett, an American devotee of Kahane who, after being active in the JDL, left New York for Israel and joined Kach. Before co-founding Zo Artzeinu, Sackett had been the executive director of the Kach splinter group Kahane Chai.⁶⁵⁰ As the Oslo Accords progressed, the group—which had a disproportionate number of American members—organized mass civil disobedience actions, including blocking roads, an approach they saw as following in the footsteps of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi.⁶⁵¹ Ami Pedahzur argues that Zo Artzeinu was emblematic of the “old radical right” in Israel giving way to the “new radical right” in response to the Oslo Accords, inasmuch as its politics were even more far right, its willingness to oppose the government even more pronounced, and its attitude toward ceding territory even more hardline (in contrast to, say, Begin, who had overseen the return of the Sinai).⁶⁵² Pedahzur’s claim that this was a watershed

⁶⁵⁰ Richard J. Chasdi, *Tapestry of Terror: A Portrait of Middle East Terrorism, 1994-1999* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), 314, 316.

⁶⁵¹ Hellinger, Hershkovitz, and Susser, *Religious Zionism*, 143. Pedahzur notes that the Americans in Zo Artzeinu “grew up in the legacy of the civil rights movement,” although he does not interrogate this further. This apparent paradox is, however, the subject of Sara Yael Hirschhorn’s *City on a Hilltop: American Jews and the Israeli Settler Movement* (2017), which contends that American Jews’ dedication to the settlement project is rooted in a legacy of Jewish liberal activism in the U.S. civil rights movement. More specifically, Hirschhorn’s thesis is that American Jews in Israel’s early settler movement were liberals who imported their U.S. civil rights framework and put it to work in service of creating ideal communities that would set an example to other Jews around the world. This framing, however, elides the exceptionalism of American (and Israeli) liberalism, which tends to perceive tolerance and uplift where there is hegemony and erasure. It also fails to differentiate between the form of activism that these Americans adopted in each country, which may have had some similarities, and the content, which certainly did not. Hirschhorn’s argument also fails to account for the power differential between lending support to a non-dominant group taking on an entrenched legacy of systematic racism, and bolstering—as part of the hegemonic group—a heavily-militarized state occupying another people.

⁶⁵² Pedahzur, *Triumph of the Radical Right*, 108-9.

moment for the Israeli far right is a sound one, even if the description of the old guard vanishing within the space of a few months, only to be just as rapidly replaced with the new, is somewhat over-condensed. Netanyahu, after all, was just as much a harbinger of this changing of the guard, while bringing a significant amount of “old radical right” heritage with him. Nonetheless, the Israeli far right did adapt considerably in response to the peace process, adopting new tactics and anointing new leaders, even as it sought to work in collaboration with the institutions that came out of the movement’s “first generation.”⁶⁵³

The reverberations from Oslo manifested elsewhere on the Israeli far right. As with the land concessions of the 1970s and 1980s, the religious-Zionist far right experienced a spiritual crisis that, in time, would lead to yet further radicalization—including, notably, accelerated efforts to increase Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif (efforts that Feiglin, not incidentally, supported) in a bid to change “facts on the ground.”⁶⁵⁴ The Kahanists, some of whom numbered among Zo Artzeinu’s membership, doubled-down on their oft-repeated mantra that what Kahane warned about was coming to pass; Baruch Marzel, meanwhile, expressed his impatience for the Israeli army to leave Hebron (one of the eventual phases of the Accords), so that the Jewish settlers there could “take care of the Arabs.”⁶⁵⁵ Loose networks of far-right settlers, many of them from the extremist Kiryat Arba settlement near Hebron, stepped up terror attacks against Palestinians.⁶⁵⁶ Coalitions of far-right groups staged mass protests, including one

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁴ Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism*, 72.

⁶⁵⁵ See, for example, Benyamin Ze’ev Kahane, “Tzofeh LeBeit Yisrael” [“Watching the House of Israel”] *Way of the Torah*, no. 282 (October 1993), Jabotinsky Institute archives, Kaf 24 - 10/4; Cynthia Mann, “Opponents of Peace With PLO Stage Massive Rally in Jerusalem,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, September 8, 1993.

⁶⁵⁶ Pedahzur and Perliger, *Jewish Terrorism in Israel*, 98-9.

in Jerusalem shortly after Rabin's cabinet approved the peace accord, which attracted tens of thousands—Kahanists among them—and at which Netanyahu was a main speaker.⁶⁵⁷ And in the Knesset, the opposition—led by the Likud—began undermining the peace process, and the government leading it, at every opportunity. Netanyahu himself, who with Oslo embarked on “the real start of his leadership campaign,” compared, in a Knesset speech, the Rabin government's agreement with the PLO to the 1938 Munich Agreement between Hitler and the British government (although he was far from the first Likud member to draw the comparison in response to the threat of peace).⁶⁵⁸

Despite his intensive efforts, however, Netanyahu at first struggled to make his mark on the Oslo debate within Israel, even as the first real test of his Likud leadership—the local elections in November 1993—delivered both Jerusalem and Tel Aviv to the party, alongside dozens of other victories.⁶⁵⁹ In the U.S., though, things were different: Netanyahu—and his party—were able to capitalize on his continued popularity there, as well as on Likud's deep ties to the American-Jewish establishment as a result of its long dominance of Israeli politics, and on the groundswell of opposition to Rabin that had been building up among conservative American-Jewish elements since his election victory. Thus, for example, did Labor officials themselves feel unable to compete with Netanyahu's “Americanized communications skills” and his heightened profile as well as that of his predecessor Shamir, the latter of whom railed against the Accords

⁶⁵⁷ Mann, “Opponents of Peace.”

⁶⁵⁸ Pfeffer, *Bibi*, 199.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 199-201.

before a COP audience in late 1993 in the final shot of a sustained propaganda campaign against the Labor government.⁶⁶⁰

Likud's "publicity blitz" aside, the anti-Oslo camp had solid representation in the U.S.⁶⁶¹ Norman Podhoretz, performing a reverse ferret in *Commentary*, lambasted the Oslo Accords and the Rabin government's involvement in them, after previously arguing that American Jews had no right to criticize Israel.⁶⁶² The ZOA, which had appointed a new president, Mort Klein, in late 1993, also came out swinging against the Accords. Under Klein, who drove the ZOA firmly into far-right territory, the organization not only publicly criticized the Israeli government—breaking with previous policy—but also went so far as to attempt to lobby Congress into derailing the peace process.⁶⁶³ AIPAC, although ostensibly now led by a liberal president, had had a "tense and frosty" relationship with Rabin since his election, and struggled with having to pivot from firmly standing with previous Israeli governments that utterly ruled out negotiating with the PLO.⁶⁶⁴ Still under the sway of its powerful right-wing contingent, AIPAC offered "half-hearted at best" support for Oslo, and at times actively sought to undermine the peace process—with some of its members even joining the ZOA's efforts to lobby Congress against it.⁶⁶⁵ And the religious far right, above all within the New York Jewish community, expressed such frenzied

⁶⁶⁰ Larry Yudelson, "The Diaspora Lag: Once Israel's Staunchest Backers, Likudniks in U.S. Freely Criticize," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, May 24, 1993; Cynthia Mann, "Labor Party Makes Pitch to Gain U.S. Jews' Support," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, December 17, 1993.

⁶⁶¹ Mann, "Labor Party."

⁶⁶² Balint, *Running Commentary*, 173-4.

⁶⁶³ Waxman, *Trouble in the Tribe*, 159.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 160-1.

opposition to the accords that in comparison, the discourse in Israel seemed “almost subdued,” according to the journalists Michael Karpin and Ina Friedman.⁶⁶⁶

Indeed, the labeling of Rabin as a “traitor” in the U.S. predated the use of the same language in Israel, as did accusations of treason and calls to kill the prime minister.⁶⁶⁷ The potential for disaster caused by all this acrimony became clear in the first week of 1994.⁶⁶⁸ After a sustained period of escalation, which included right-wingers hurling abuse and even food at Israeli government representatives visiting the U.S. and a protest in New York’s Times Square where hundreds of protesters called Rabin a “traitor” and waved placards depicting him in a Palestinian *keffiyeh* (a traditional scarf), far-right Jewish activists planted bombs outside the New York offices of Americans for Peace Now and the New Israel Fund, another liberal organization.⁶⁶⁹ Although the devices were found before they detonated, they were a warning shot about the direction the Oslo debate was heading in—and how much worse it could still get.

⁶⁶⁶ Michael Karpin and Ina Friedman, *Murder in the Name of God: The Plot to Kill Yitzhak Rabin* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 130.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶⁶⁸ Leonard Fine, “Denounce Mudslinging Preachers of Violence,” *The Jewish News of Northern California*, January 14, 1994.

⁶⁶⁹ Gary Rosenblatt, “Words Beget Violence,” *The Australian Jewish News*, January 21, 1994; Larry Yudelson, “After 2 Bombs Defused in New York, Debate Rages Over Rhetoric’s Impact,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, January 11, 1994. The New York rally had been organized by the recently-established World Committee for Israel, one of whose co-founders was Netanyahu donor Manfred Lehmann. The WCI had also sponsored an August 1993 series of protests in Tel Aviv, culminating in a 70,000-strong rally, including West Bank settlers, in the city’s Charles Clore Park, whose rolling terrain covers the ruins of demolished Palestinian homes formerly part of Jaffa’s al-Manshiyeh neighborhood. An earlier action in the same series of protests involved an armed demonstration outside Rabin’s home. Hugh Orgel, “Some 70,000 Gather to Protest Rabin Policies in Peace Talks,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, August 13, 1993. In December of that year, the WCI accused Netanyahu of misdirecting \$200,000 he’d raised from the organization during a trip to New York, which he allegedly used to pay off Likud debts rather than transferring the funds to the Yesha Council, as the donors had intended. “Likud Denies Charges on Netanyahu,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, December 14, 1993.

The rebellion against the Oslo Accords was intensifying in Israel, too. Far-right settlers in particular were increasingly desperate, and Kach and Kahane Chai activists were continuing their assaults on Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Binyamin Ze'ev Kahane, recycling some of his father's staple talking points, told a *New York Times* reporter in February 1994 that Israelis "have to decide whether they want a Jewish state, which means annexing the territories, evicting the Arabs, having Jewish and Zionist education instead of Western education, and putting the media in national Zionist hands." The same report, which noted the disproportionate number of Americans among the West Bank's "most militant groups," speculated that Kach and Kahane Chai presented a "threat of future violence that ... could unsettle plans for the introduction of Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho, and for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from both."⁶⁷⁰

Within days, that warned-of violent sabotage came to pass. On February 25, 1994—the day after reports emerged about the Israeli army preparing to withdraw from Jericho and Gaza—Baruch Goldstein, the long-term Kahane acolyte who had served as both a Kach campaign manager and candidate, decided to make his own intervention.⁶⁷¹ Having already developed a reputation as a "fierce bully" among the Muslim worshippers who prayed at Hebron's Ibrahimi Mosque/Cave of the Patriarchs, on that Friday morning, Goldstein walked into the packed prayer hall dressed in the army uniform that marked him out as an Israeli citizen, and committed the

⁶⁷⁰ Joel Greenberg, "Jewish Militants Hope to Block Israel-P.L.O. Plans," *New York Times*, February 21, 1994.

⁶⁷¹ David Landau, "Officials Say Israel is Preparing to Vacate Gaza and Jericho in May," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, February 24, 1994.

most American of atrocities: mass murder with an assault rifle.⁶⁷² Killing 29 Palestinians and wounding over 100 more, before being beaten to death himself by survivors, Goldstein succeeded in not only provoking long-term, devastating—for Palestinians—changes to Hebron’s security architecture, but also setting off a gruesome wave of reprisals and counter-reprisals that helped fatally undermine the Oslo Accords. An immediate retaliation came in the form of a spate of bombings by Hamas, a militant Islamist group based primarily in the Gaza Strip that had grown in prominence during the first intifada (which by this time had dwindled to a halt). The violence gradually turned Israeli public opinion against the peace process, which also provided Netanyahu with his opportunity to step into the spotlight.⁶⁷³ But the resumption of tit-for-tat violence, and the broad and vocal condemnations of Goldstein’s actions from most corners of the political spectrum, masked clear signs that the Israeli far right was not done with the Oslo Accords—or with the government signing off on them.

The Rabin cabinet certainly attempted evasive maneuvers coupled with a resounding rebuke of the movement from which Goldstein had sprung. Within weeks of the attack, the Israeli government unanimously voted to outlaw Kach and Kahane Chai, declaring them terrorist organizations. But there was, broadly-speaking, a general lack of introspection regarding the provenance of a man such as Goldstein. For one thing, in a revival of the 1980s talking points that accompanied Kach’s terrorist activities in the West Bank, Goldstein’s American background

⁶⁷² Richard Lacayo, “The Making of a Murderous Fanatic,” *Time*, March 7, 1994, <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,980282-1,00.html>.

⁶⁷³ Caspit, *Netanyahu Years*, 117.

became central to the postmortem.⁶⁷⁴ Immigration Minister Yair Tsaban proposed “restrictions on Jewish anti-Arab extremists seeking entry” to Israel, because so many Kach members were from the U.S.; a few weeks later, however, once the heat of the moment had passed, he backed away from his earlier comments, stating that Kach or Kahane Chai membership was not in of itself a barrier to immigrating to Israel even though they were, by that point, outlawed terrorist organizations.⁶⁷⁵ In a move that no doubt caused some discomfort over the Atlantic, Tsaban also announced Education Ministry plans to send information on extremist groups to American-Jewish institutions, in the hope they would prove useful in teaching Jews there about groups that bring “shame to our Jewish people, Jewish heritage, and Jewish values.”⁶⁷⁶ And on the Israeli street, the perception that such radical violence was a foreign—and specifically American—import also prevailed. American Jews in Israel found themselves confronted by Israelis about their beliefs, while Allon Gal, an Israeli scholar of American-Jewish history, told a reporter that Israel had become “a dumping ground for some of the dreck of American Jewry ... [who] came in the 1980s, in an atmosphere created by the Likud Party, which gave them the feeling that people could live here like the white man in America 200 years ago with the Indians.”⁶⁷⁷ Rabin,

⁶⁷⁴ By contrast, Goldstein’s American identity has been strikingly elided in some of the American-Jewish historiography. Similarly to the lacuna Shaul Magid has identified regarding Kahane, American-Jewish historians have, at times, seemed to refrain from “claiming” Goldstein: his name does not appear once in Jonathan Sarna’s *magnum opus* on American Jewry, and in his monograph on American-Jewish reactions to the Oslo Accords, Neil Rubín mentions Baruch Goldstein only once, in a footnote, where he curiously describes him solely as an “Israeli settler.” Neil Rubín, *American Jewry and the Oslo Years* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 165n13.

⁶⁷⁵ Scott Kraft, “Kach’s Numbers Small, But Impact Could Be Huge,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1994. Israel State Archives, ISA-PrivateCollections-AmnonRubinstein-0008nt; Stephen Weiss, “Tsaban Says Kach Membership is Not Automatic Bar to Aliyah,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, March 25, 1994.

⁶⁷⁶ Steven Weiss, “Tsaban Says Kach Membership is Not Automatic Bar to Aliyah,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, March 25, 1994.

⁶⁷⁷ Judith Colp Rubín, “Israelis Fearing an Invasion of Extremist American Jews,” *Washington Times*, March 3, 1994.

in a speech to the Knesset, at least acknowledged the transnational dimensions of the Goldstein massacre, noting that he came from “a swamp that has its sources in foreign lands as well as here.”⁶⁷⁸ But he also insisted that Goldstein and his peers “are not part of the community of Israel ... You are a foreign body, you are pernicious weeds.”⁶⁷⁹ The insistence was, as it had been in the past, that Jewish right-wing extremism was both an import and a mutation, thoroughly disconnected from the practices of the Israeli state and alien to Israel’s political and religious culture. This, as well as the political headache it would have caused, served to stay Rabin’s hand when the question of whether to evacuate the radical settler community from Hebron arose in the wake of the massacre.⁶⁸⁰ But in time, this failure to act—and the ongoing exceptionalization and externalization of Jewish terrorism in Israel—would prove fatal on multiple fronts.

The Hebron massacre was met with shock and near-universal condemnation, aside from among Goldstein’s fellow Kahanists and parts of the religious far right, who considered him a martyr who had sacrificed himself to save—directly or indirectly—Jewish lives, and had “sanctified God’s name” in the process.⁶⁸¹ His funeral was attended by hundreds of sympathizers, including a university student by the name of Yigal Amir, who would be greatly impressed by what he saw and heard that day. Prominent rabbis eulogized Goldstein, including Israel Ariel, the former Kach

⁶⁷⁸ Zertal and Eldar, *Lords of the Land*, 122.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 122-3.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁶⁸¹ Pedahzur and Perliger, *Jewish Terrorism in Israel*, 71.

Knesset candidate, and Dov Lior, then-chief rabbi of Kiryat Arba, who in defense of his eulogy compared Goldstein to a Holocaust victim.⁶⁸²

The backlash to the massacre failed to dampen the Israeli- and American-Jewish far right's growing incitement against Rabin and their increasingly vociferous opposition to the peace process. And even if Netanyahu did not openly lead the incitement, he and Likud never seemed to be far from the site of hate-filled protests against the Accords, while Likud USA—the party's U.S. chapter, which had sprouted out of the Herut USA group, itself born of the historical Revisionist apparatus in the country—mimicked the incendiary rhetoric that was reverberating around Israel-Palestine and among the religious far right in the U.S. In his fall 1994 letter to members, Likud USA's president Howard Barbanel, who was the JDL's national student director in the 1970s, and chairman George Meissner, a prominent lawyer and diehard Kahane supporter, discussed the “Rabin-Arafat Accords” and accused the “Israeli and American Jewish left ... of demoniz[ing]” settlers across the occupied territories.⁶⁸³ The letter repeatedly implied that Rabin was responsible for pandering to terrorists and thus facilitating violence against Jews, while accusing him of having committed an anti-Likud purge upon taking office.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸² Letter from Rabbi Dov Leor [sic] to Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, printed in Aharon Lichtenstein, Avraham Kurzweil, Shmuel Haber, and Dov Leor, “A Rabbinic Exchange on Baruch Goldstein's Funeral,” *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 28, no. 4 (Summer 1994), 61.

⁶⁸³ George Meissner and Howard Barbanel, Letter to Likud USA members, fall 1994, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel-16 Bet/7.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid. Support for Baruch Goldstein did not make one *persona non grata* among I.S. Likudniks. In fall 1995, Likud USA hosted a reception marking the seventieth anniversary of “the Jabotinsky movement,” at which Netanyahu donor Manfred Lehmann—who had in the meantime lauded Goldstein's massacre as a “pre-emptive strike” on a par with the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising—was honored. Likud USA, “70th Anniversary of the Jabotinsky Movement” invitation, September 20, 1995, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel-16 Bet/7; Manfred R. Lehmann, “One Year Later... Purim Hebron Remembered,” *manfredlehmann.com*, February 1995, <https://www.manfredlehmann.com/sieg440.html>. Ehud Olmert and Yitzhak Shamir were listed on the event pamphlet as “Honorary Event Chairmen.” The NY Democratic Assemblyman Dov Hikind was on the event committee; Hikind was central to winning then-NY Mayor Rudy Giuliani's sympathy for the anti-Oslo cause. Karpin and Friedman, *Murder in the Name*, 152-6.

In Israel, meanwhile, Likud and other far-right groups clubbed together in January 1995 and formed a joint base of operations for opposing the Accords in which Kach and Kahane Chai participated, although at their own initiative.⁶⁸⁵ This coalition staged regular protests outside Rabin's home, where chants of "Rabin is a murderer" and "Rabin is a traitor" became a standard feature.⁶⁸⁶ As the atmosphere deteriorated, Minister for Education and Sport Amnon Rubinstein appeared on Israel's leading nightly news show to push back on "any suggestion that there is a little [Baruch] Goldstein in the heart of every Jew," while arguing that his ministry did not have a role to play in tackling extremism, which should be left to the law.⁶⁸⁷

Eventually, anti-Oslo protesters threatened to condemn Rabin and his wife to the same fate as Benito Mussolini and Nicolae Ceaușescu and their respective wives. This was no spontaneous, grassroots movement: as journalist Ben Caspit has noted, Netanyahu's "people" ran "a special headquarters ... with the objective of turning Rabin's public life into a living hell," a core part of which was to incite the far right.⁶⁸⁸ Netanyahu, for his part, both ignored security service warnings that the atmosphere of hate risked inspiring an assassination attempt against the prime minister, and did little to try and actively tamp down on the violent rhetoric of his party's young activists.⁶⁸⁹ Indeed, he participated in multiple anti-Rabin protests while riding a wave of growing popularity in the face of the post-Hebron violence. As early as March 1994, Netanyahu

⁶⁸⁵ Caspit, *Netanyahu Years*, 116.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁷ Transcript of Amnon Rubinstein appearance on "Mabat," *Channel 1*, February 14, 1995, Israel State Archives, ISA-PrivateCollections-AmnonRubinstein-0008nt. It will be recalled that polls in the 1980s showed disproportionate support for Kahane and Kach among the young (see ch. 4).

⁶⁸⁸ Caspit, *Netanyahu Years*, 117.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

had appeared at the head of a far-right protest in the central Israel city of Ra'anana, alongside a mock coffin which displayed the words "Rabin is killing Zionism" and, briefly, a hangman's noose. In July 1995, he told a crowd of protesters in the central city of Kfar Saba, who were actively calling for Rabin's death, that Rabin was "preparing towns of refuge for the terrorists."⁶⁹⁰ A couple of months later, he appeared on a balcony overlooking a mass demonstration in Jerusalem's Zion Square, as protesters once more called for the death of Rabin while denouncing the prime minister as a "traitor"; some in the crowd burned pictures of Rabin, while others held up mock-ups of him either in Nazi uniform or a *keffiyeh*.⁶⁹¹

One frequent attendee at these protests was Yigal Amir, who had been at Goldstein's funeral and who was fanatically opposed to the Oslo Accords and to Rabin's position as prime minister. He took seriously the prominent religious-Zionist rabbis who said that *din rodef* ("law of the pursuer")—a Talmudic injunction that permits the killing of someone who poses a threat to the life of a Jew—applied to Rabin, on the basis that he was responsible for the planned ceding of parts of "Greater Israel" to the Palestinians. Amir had also acquired and read from cover to cover all five hundred and fifty pages of a new book, *Baruch HaGever* (which translates as both "Baruch the Man" and "Blessed is the Man"), an anthology of essays and eulogies in honor of

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., 120.

⁶⁹¹ There is some disagreement between Netanyahu's two most recent biographers, Ben Caspit and Anshel Pfeffer, over his role in the Zion Square protest. Pfeffer claims that Netanyahu could not clearly see what was happening and insists that he verbally objected to the chants and denounced the protesters' behavior when he learned what had been going on beneath him; Caspit, on the other hand, writes that not only had Netanyahu "ordered the Likud youth to intensify their demonstrations," but that, at Zion Square, he "watched hundreds of children screaming 'death to Rabin,' and said nothing." Pfeffer, *Bibi*, 209; Caspit, *Netanyahu Years*, 123. In *Lords of the Land*, historian Idith Zertal and journalist Akiva Eldar concur with the latter view, calling Netanyahu "the inspiration and the driving force behind the violent demonstrations in the streets." Zertal and Eldar, *Lords of the Land*, 143.

Baruch Goldstein.⁶⁹² Compiled and edited by Kach and Kahane Chai activists, the book grew out of a leaflet—itsself based on a talk defending Goldstein’s massacre—delivered by Yitzhak Ginsburgh, an American-born Haredi rabbi who had moved to Israel in the 1960s and was, at the time of the book’s publication, head of the far-right Od Yosef Chai yeshiva in occupied Nablus. Although Ginsburgh had never openly followed Kahane, he was nonetheless staying true to form in praising Goldstein, having notoriously issued religious rulings justifying the murders of Palestinians in the late 1980s by some of his students.⁶⁹³ Among *Baruch HaGever*’s essays was one written by Binyamin Ze’ev Kahane, which stood out from the rest: rather than focusing on the duty to kill Palestinians when crisis loomed, Kahane—much like his father—discussed the role that secular Jews were playing in the nation’s downfall, and invoked the Hasmonean dynasty during which devout Jews pursued and killed their Hellenized peers.⁶⁹⁴ With the Israeli street descending ever further into uncontrollable rage, it would not be long before Amir made Kahane proud.

⁶⁹² Dan Efron, *Killing A King: The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and the Remaking of Israel* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015), 184. The full title of the book is *Baruch/Blessed is the Man: A Memorial Book for the Saint Dr. Baruch Goldstein, May G-d Avenge His Blood*.

⁶⁹³ Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother*, 259. Ginsburgh is an important figure on the transnational Jewish far right, although the timing of his real rise to prominence—as the spiritual leader of the so-called “hilltop youth,” who began to be recognized as a discrete social group in the 2000s—places him somewhat outside the scope of this study. However, there is an open question as to the role his Americanness has—or hasn’t—played in his own extremism and in his shaping of the worldview of his acolytes, who largely reject the authority of the state and bear some resemblance in this regard to anti-government extremists in the U.S. In their study of religious Zionism and the settlements, Hellinger *et al* deem Ginsburgh Israel’s most extreme religious ideologue since Kahane. Hellinger, Hershkowitz, and Susser, *Religious Zionism*, 116.

⁶⁹⁴ Sprinzak, *Brother Against Brother*, 264.

Under the gun

On October 6, the day after the Zion Square protest, Rabin presented Oslo II to the Knesset. Despite his assurances that the agreement would neither give Palestinians a full state, nor uproot settlements, nor divide Jerusalem, nor push Israel back to the Green Line, the Accord barely passed the vote.⁶⁹⁵ The prospect of transferring control over all major Palestinian cities in the West Bank—save Hebron—to the Palestinian Authority, as part of an agreement to divide the area into Zones A, B, and C, deepened the sense of crisis among the Jewish far right in Israel and the U.S.⁶⁹⁶ And, as with every other previous moment of crisis sparked by the threat of territorial loss, the far right took matters into their own hands—to devastating effect.

It was, in a grim irony, at the end of a peace rally in Tel Aviv that Amir—armed with a pistol and having temporarily ditched his kippah in order to blend in with the largely secular crowd—shot and killed Rabin, as the prime minister made his way back to his official car after having delivered a speech. Rabin died shortly after from his wounds; Peres, as his deputy in the Labor Party, became prime minister.

The murder took place on November 4, 1995, almost exactly five years to the day since Kahane had been assassinated in New York. Although Amir was not formally associated with Kahanist groups, he nonetheless moved in many of the same circles as them; read and revered their ideas, as evinced by his careful study of *Baruch HaGever*; and, perhaps most pertinently,

⁶⁹⁵ Pfeffer, *Bibi*, 209.

⁶⁹⁶ These three zones remain in place today. Israel has full security and administrative control over Area C, which is about sixty percent of the West Bank; Area B (roughly twenty-two percent) is under Israeli security control and PA administrative control, although the relative lack of Jewish inhabitants in this zone means Israel rarely deploys its forces there, rendering these parts of the West Bank even more lawless than the rest of it; and Area A (roughly eighteen percent) is nominally under full PA security and civil control, although in reality Israeli forces can—and do—enter cities in the area at will.

credited the 1994 Hebron massacre as his inspiration: “It began,” he told police investigators, “after Goldstein. It’s then that it dawned on me that one must put down [Rabin].”⁶⁹⁷ He had also, effectively, made good on the threat of Kach activist Itamar Ben Gvir, who was part of a Kach mob that surrounded Rabin’s car outside the Knesset the day of the Oslo II vote, and, brandishing on television the hood ornament they had pulled off it, declared: “Just like we got to the [ornament], so we can get to Rabin.”⁶⁹⁸

Indeed, it is in the killing of Rabin, and the figure of his assassin, that the depth and reach of Kahane’s influence, and its ability to strike at the heart of Israeli politics, become clear: the rabbi’s ideas, as Pedahzur notes, “formed the missing link that could unify the Israeli peripheries, parts of the religious Zionist camp, and many ultra-Orthodox communities” into a powerful, if somewhat scattered and decentralized, “political network.”⁶⁹⁹ Although Pedahzur is describing this phenomenon in political science terms, the same trend is visible when examined historically: at various junctures, Kahane and his movements, whether the JDL/Kach or their descendants and splinter groups, drew in adherents from across the social, religious, and ethnic spectrum, who may have borne little surface resemblance to each other but who saw in his ideas a vision of the kind of society they in which they wanted to live, and in his methods a playbook for how to deal with those who threatened that vision. Kahane’s ethnoreligious supremacism, his apocalypticism, his coronation of every male Jew (provided they were aligned with his worldview) as a king, and

⁶⁹⁷ Cited in Zertal and Eldar, *Lords of the Land*, 124. Pedahzur similarly argues that although Amir had never been part of Kach, “Kahane’s ideology had permeated his worldview.” Pedahzur, *Triumph of Israel’s Radical Right*, 118.

⁶⁹⁸ Archival footage on Shalom Achshav’s Facebook page, accessed June 3, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/ShalomAchshav.PeaceNow/videos/334414550846332/>. Itamar Ben-Gvir was elected to the Knesset in early 2021, and in late 2022 became national security minister.

⁶⁹⁹ Pedahzur, *Triumph of Israel’s Radical Right*, 79.

every Jewish woman as a potential bride for their taking alone—these were the seams in which otherwise seemingly disparate groups of people were able to find common cause.⁷⁰⁰ It is from this meeting-place that Goldstein, a Brooklyn-born Ashkenazi American immigrant working as a doctor in the West Bank’s most extreme settlement; and Amir, an Israeli from a Yemeni family, born in central Israel and studying and living within the Green Line, continued the legacy of both Kahane and the broader transnational Jewish far right—each acting out of an impulse cultivated by catastrophism, racism, and a fatalistic sense of individual religious duty.

And yet, somewhat paradoxically, it is precisely in bringing parts of the Kahanist manifesto to their logical conclusion that Goldstein and Amir helped finally end the era of violent and at times fascistic protest politics on the Jewish far right that had begun in the 1960s and 1970s, and which Kahane embodied. This is not to say that groups of this nature disappeared, but rather that their role in driving forward the Israeli agenda was drawing to a close. As discussed in the last chapter, the “need” for extra-parliamentary protest movements and pressure groups—almost all of which were religious at their core—would gradually dissipate over the coming decade as the parliamentary far right reasserted its dominance. Neoconservative institutions such as Shalem College (which superseded the Shalem Center)—often established and funded by Americans—helped cement a new far-right sociopolitical elite, and core elements of Kahane’s ideology—expulsion, segregation, the codification of Jewish supremacism, and the acceleration of the idea that there can be no Palestinian citizens of a Jewish state—became evermore accepted within, and advanced by, mainstream political parties and figures. And, as a new chapter dawned for the transnational Jewish far right, the man who was able to thread all

⁷⁰⁰ After killing Rabin, Amir portrayed himself as Pinchas—who murdered another Jew for sleeping with a gentile woman. Ephron, *Killing A King*, 142.

those elements together—the hybridized Israeli and American political cultures; the ultranationalism delivered in the language of “statesmanship”; the willingness, though secular, to act as a conduit for the demands of the religious far right; the ability to win elections by addressing Israeli voters’ concerns using American methods—was, in the wake of Amir’s assassination of Rabin, shortly to become Israeli prime minister for the first time. It should, at this point, be little surprise that when the time came, Netanyahu was able to count on Amir’s vote in his bid to bring Likud back to the apex of Israeli politics.⁷⁰¹

‘The “American” Premier’

As the condemnations and recriminations poured in after the assassination, those who had contributed to the lethal incitement against Rabin—that is to say, the various wings of the far-right anti-Oslo movement—largely declined to take responsibility for the poisonous atmosphere in Israel, instead denouncing the killing on the one hand while suggesting that Rabin and his supporters bore some responsibility for his death on the other. The religious-Zionist movement to which the assassin belonged—Amir, despite being Mizrahi, trod the path of the (almost exclusively Ashkenazi) religious-Zionist elite and was a student of its rabbis, whose opinions he sought out before assassinating Rabin—largely refrained from introspection, and furthermore distanced itself from Amir; the suggestion of religious-Zionist commentators that Amir was not really one of their own was driven largely by his Mizrahi identity.⁷⁰² In the U.S., meanwhile, even as some parts of the Orthodox movement made a rather more concerted effort to grapple

⁷⁰¹ “Rabin’s Killer Backs Netanyahu,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 6, 1996.

⁷⁰² Pedahzur and Perliger, *Jewish Terrorism*, 106-7; Zertal and Eldar, 148-50. See these pages also for discussion of those within the religious-Zionist settler movement who did turn their gaze inward to search for the root causes of the assassination—some of them Gush Emunim stalwarts.

with the source of Goldstein and Amir’s ideology, others immediately began fundraising for Amir’s legal defense.⁷⁰³ And the Israeli government was worried enough about the malign influence of a handful of far-right American-Jewish rabbis that, the month after the assassination, they barred them from entering the country.⁷⁰⁴

Netanyahu himself refused to accept any share in the blame for Rabin’s killing—the “real incitement,” he told Likud members in the Knesset the following day, “began ten minutes after Rabin’s murder”—even as it became clear that much of the public held him at least partially responsible.⁷⁰⁵ Netanyahu’s chief representative in the U.S., Likud USA president Barbanel, struck an equally defiant tone, telling CNN’s Judy Woodruff that while the assassination was “repulsive,” there was “a lot of blame to go around on both sides ... Clearly, part of what set this up was an atmosphere that was created by the former prime minister in which he vociferously attacked his opponents ... We need to have a more civil level of discourse; I know that Likud leaders have been calling for that for some time.”⁷⁰⁶ Nor did Barbanel’s organization tone down its rhetoric: in the first post-assassination edition of its in-house organ, *Zionism Today*, a full-page membership call features a photograph of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain shaking hands with Hitler above a photograph of a smiling Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat.

⁷⁰³ Karpin and Friedman, *Murder in the Name*, 160.

⁷⁰⁴ “Soul-Searching Persists in the Orthodox Community,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, December 5, 1995; Karpin and Friedman, 161. Those entry bans were lifted three years later by then-Interior Minister Eli Suissa, of Shas. Ibid.

⁷⁰⁵ Pfeffer, *Bibi*, 216. Netanyahu’s poll numbers declined precipitously in those early weeks after the shooting, with Peres surging past him. Peres also benefited from the relatively uneventful withdrawal of Israeli troops from several Palestinian cities in the West Bank, in accordance with Oslo II—all of which was overshadowed by the ongoing shock from Rabin’s murder. Pfeffer, *Bibi*, 216, 221.

⁷⁰⁶ Howard Barbanel, interview with Judy Woodruff, “CNN Sunday Morning,” *CNN*, November 5, 1995, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LbertDgsOU>.



Hitler and Chamberlain meeting in Munich.

Seems Like Deja Vu All Over Again.

Britain's Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain met with and appeased Adolf Hitler in September 1938, just before Kristallnacht — the night of broken glass which foreshadowed the destruction of European Jewry in the years to follow.

Since the Rabin-Arafat handshake in September 1993 Israel has been bombarded by broken glass and shattered lives. As bombs exploded in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Afula, Ashdod, Beit Lid and across the country, over **214 Jews have been murdered** and many more seriously injured. The "The Argument to End Terrorism" has triggered a quadrupling of terror. Ofra Felix, Alissa Flatow, David Lido and Nachshon Waxman were among those sacrificed on the left-



wing's altar of appeasement. How many more must die?

Shimon Peres said last February that his ultimate ambition in life is to be Secretary General of the United Nations. Yasser Arafat's ultimate ambition is a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

Likud USA is the only U.S. Zionist organization that stands 100% against this bloody defeatist process and 100% behind the territorial integrity of the Land of Israel. The Likud. Likud USA

In your heart you know we're right. You believe. You're a supporter. Stand-up for Israel. Defend Jerusalem. Defend the Golan. Be more than just a supporter, be a member. Join today. Likud USA.

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Fig. 5.1: Likud USA membership advert in *Zionism Today*, 1996, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Gimel 16 - Bet/7.

Peres, the advertisement suggested, was responsible for inflicting another *Kristallnacht* on the Jewish people—and in so doing was hastening the sort of catastrophe foreshadowed by the “night of broken glass.”⁷⁰⁷

Much to the delight of the Jewish far right in both countries, Peres’ premiership would be a short one. He was determined to hang on until the next scheduled elections, which were due to take place later in 1996, so that he could claim success based on his own leadership, rather than calling a snap election and coasting to victory with an electorate still in shock and mourning. Eventually, in the first half of February, Peres announced that elections would be held at the end of May, when Netanyahu was still down by double digits in electoral polls. But Netanyahu had been preparing for a general election campaign since Rabin’s assassination—and that preparation had begun in New York.

By the time Ron Lauder, Netanyahu’s longtime supporter and donor, introduced him to Arthur Finkelstein in December 1995, the latter had been a longtime fixture in conservative—and especially neoconservative—American politics. He’d helped Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan win the presidency, and his campaign strategies had ushered numerous Republican senators and mayors into power, including in otherwise safe Democratic seats. His approach to polling and targeting voters was forensic, and his messaging tactics revolved around hammering home negative slogans about his candidates’ opponents.⁷⁰⁸ Netanyahu hired Finkelstein on the spot in

⁷⁰⁷ Likud USA, “Seems Like Deja Vu All Over Again,” *Zionism Today* (Spring 1996), 8, Jabotinsky Institute archives, Herut/Likud collection, Gimel - 16 Bet/7.

⁷⁰⁸ Pfeffer, *Bibi*, 223-4.

New York after flying there especially to meet him, with the strategist's \$1,000-an-hour fee to be covered by Lauder and other American-Jewish backers.⁷⁰⁹

Finkelstein's anti-Peres attack ads were carefully crafted, based on precise data drawn from microtargeting and careful analysis of the mood of different streams of the electorate. But current events would help Netanyahu, and the messages Finkelstein developed for him, enormously. Shortly after Peres' election announcement, Hamas carried out a string of devastating bombings inside Israel, killing dozens of Israelis. The attacks, retaliations for Israel's targeted assassination of the organization's leading bombmaker (which Rabin had signed off on), ended a lull in violence following the spike caused by the Goldstein massacre and left Peres—who, like Rabin, was serving as minister of defense as well as prime minister—wide open to negative campaigning. Likud's 1996 campaign ads thereby focused on Israelis' deteriorating sense of security; on the now-presumed folly of making peace amid such circumstances; on aspects of the Oslo Accords that were a long way from any kind of resolution and thus ripe for fear-mongering; and on casting Netanyahu as a natural leader. The key slogan Finkelstein helped devise, "Peres will divide Jerusalem," forced the Labor Party to play defense and centered an issue—the status of Jerusalem as Israel's undivided capital—that the vast majority of Israelis were aligned around.⁷¹⁰ A Likud flier called on "Defense Minister Peres [to] go home," while Netanyahu told voters via Likud election broadcasts that he, like Menachem Begin, would bring

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., 224; Caspit, 128.

⁷¹⁰ Pfeffer, *Bibi*, 225; Labor Party, "V'Yerushalayim Tishkon LaVetach" ["And Jerusalem Shall Dwell Safely"], campaign flier, 1996, accessed June 5, 2022, National Library of Israel, 14th Knesset Election Campaign Materials, https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/Hebrew/collections/treasures/elections/elections_materials/Pages/elect_ephemera_1996.aspx.

them a “secure peace.”⁷¹¹ The backdrop for Netanyahu’s direct-to-camera election bits were staged to resemble both Israeli and American halls of power.⁷¹²

In the end, the American strategizing, presentation, and money that drove Netanyahu’s campaign also helped deliver him the keys to the prime minister’s office when the elections were held in May. Yet it was not American style and politicking alone that pushed Netanyahu over the finish line. He had amassed a diverse coalition of support, bringing together—much as had Kahane—the religious right, including religious Zionists and Haredim; Mizrahim; the right-wing settler movement; and immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Like Kahane, Netanyahu’s populist rhetoric of “us vs. them” (“them” being Palestinians and, to a lesser degree, the Labor-Zionist elite)—which Finkelstein pushed, but by no means innovated—was the glue that held his base together, and which relied on canny and novel political marketing, but also on decades of Israeli cultural, political, and historical norms that had cemented the ethnocentric core of Israeli-Jewish identity.⁷¹³ The hybridity of Netanyahu’s potent political style was evident as soon as he won his inaugural election: he may have been Israel’s first “‘American’ Premier,” according to the *New York Times*, but he was also possessed of “an Israeli core ... a native ‘sabrah’ reared on militant Zionism [and] honed in an elite commando unit.”⁷¹⁴

⁷¹¹ Likud, “Sar HaBitachon Peres—HaBayitah!” [“Defense Minister Peres—Go Home!”], campaign flier, National Library of Israel, 14th Knesset Election Campaign Materials, accessed June 5, 2022, https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/Hebrew/collections/treasures/elections/elections_materials/Pages/elect_ephemera_1996.aspx; Jerrold Kessel, “Israel election ads hold no surprises,” *CNN*, May 10, 1996, <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9605/10/israel.elex/index.html>.

⁷¹² Pedahzur, *Triumph of Israel’s Radical Right*, 120.

⁷¹³ Dennis W. Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 390.

⁷¹⁴ Schemann, “The ‘American’ Premier.”

In the U.S., too, Netanyahu’s coalition—far more homogeneous than that in Israel, but no less powerful for it—had formed, and would remain intact for the long-haul. The mega-donors, including Irving Moskowitz, who funded his campaign—seemingly breaching a 1994 U.S. federal law that banned foreign donations—would continue to write checks in support of Netanyahu’s political career, while also providing tax-exempt funds to far-right settlement projects.⁷¹⁵ American-Jewish neoconservatives, long admiring of Netanyahu, wasted no time in pitching his new government. Shortly after it was sworn in, a group of political advisors and strategists representing key neoconservative and pro-Israel think tanks, some of whom shared donors with Netanyahu, drafted a policy document, “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm,” which advised, *inter alia*, that Israel walk away from the Oslo Accords, increase military spending, and expand privatization and tax cuts.⁷¹⁶ Among the contributors to the document, which has been dubbed a “US-Israeli neoconservative manifesto,” were Richard Perle and Douglas Feith, who would go on to high-level appointments in the George W. Bush administration, and the latter of whom ran a law firm with Marc Zell, who had attended a Gush Emunim ‘pilot trip’ to Israel all the way back in the 1980s before moving to Israel for good (see

⁷¹⁵ As previously discussed, several of these funders were previous supporters of Kahane. In 1995, a new outfit—the Education Fund for Israel—was formed by an American-Jewish fundraiser for Netanyahu and Likud, Steven Friedman. Ostensibly a youth charity, the organization reportedly funneled donations to Netanyahu for his 1996 election campaign, and one of its biggest funders was Moskowitz. EFI’s president, Gil Segal, had previously helped fund Kahane’s U.S. speaking tours. Lawrence Cohler-Esses, “Likud’s Tangled Charity Web,” *New York Jewish Week*, February 19, 1999, <https://www.jta.org/1999/02/19/ny/likuds-tangled-charity-web>.

⁷¹⁶ Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies, “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm,” 1996, accessed June 5, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140125123844/http://www.iasps.org/strat1.htm>. Among the groups represented were JINSA; the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies, which had offices in Jerusalem and Washington; and the Washington Institute for Near East Studies, founded in 1985 by Barbi Weinberg, the wife of AIPAC “officers group” head Larry Weinberg.

ch. 4).⁷¹⁷ And AIPAC, which had never reconciled itself to the leadership of Neal Sher, finally managed to force him out, replacing him with the officers group's original pick: Howard Kohr, formerly of the National Jewish Coalition (also known as the Republican Jewish Coalition) and firmly aligned with Likud, who has been the lobby group's executive director ever since.⁷¹⁸

Unlike Rabin's election in 1992, Netanyahu's electoral victory did, in fact, pave the way for a new era in Israeli politics. In so doing, he also brought the transnational Jewish far right into its own new age. There would be challenges to this hegemony, of course—Israelis were not ready to give up on peace en masse just yet, and there would be another two-year blip on Likud's electoral record when Labor's Ehud Barak won early elections in 1999, after disagreements over the ongoing peace negotiations fatally undermined Netanyahu's government—but soon Likud, and later Netanyahu, would resume their monopoly over Israeli politics, as well as over American-Jewish intracommunal politics.⁷¹⁹ Netanyahu's 1996 victory, and his later record as Israel's longest-serving prime minister, were achieved precisely by his being the inheritor of a transnational relationship, and ideology, that spanned most of the twentieth century, and which had a discrete history as a distinct political movement, but which was nonetheless deeply woven into the wider history and ideology of Zionism. In many ways, Netanyahu's success was a

⁷¹⁷ Jason Vest, "The Men from JINSA and CSP," *The Nation*, August 15, 2002, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/men-jinsa-and-csp/>. Zell was by this time a Likud party activist who campaigned for Netanyahu in the 1996 election. In an interview later that year, he described the sense that he'd witnessed a miracle when, famously, what appeared to be a Peres victory in the wake of the exit polls morphed into a dead heat and then a Netanyahu victory as vote-counting continued through the night. Ernstoff, "The Guardians of Israel."

⁷¹⁸ Matthew Dorf, "AIPAC Executive Director Resigns to Take New Post," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, May 29, 1996.

⁷¹⁹ Arthur Finkelstein was a major figure on Ariel Sharon's 2001 election campaign team, as well as Netanyahu's 2009 electoral victory that brought him back into power as Israel's prime minister.

reflection of the journey Israeli society had taken over the past decades—the increasing illiberalism; the deepening political radicalization; the growing allergy toward any aspect of Palestinian identity or culture—which was itself rooted in the country’s legacy of ethnic cleansing, settler colonialism, and military occupation. The new prime minister did not introduce any of these ideas and processes into Israeli politics and society. But he embodied their spirit, and framed them as not just defensible but noble and even liberatory, in ways that were legible to his supporters in both Israel and the U.S. In his ability to speak the transnational Jewish far right’s language and amass broad support while staying true to much of its vision, Netanyahu had rapidly become the movement’s most effective figurehead—a man who was able to unlock and hold onto the kind of power the far right had dreamed of in its early years, and which it was so long denied. The “American premier,” the “king of Israel,” had arrived at last.

Conclusion

On November 1, 2022, Israelis went to the polls for the fifth time in under four years and voted in a Kahanist electoral slate as the third-largest party in the Knesset. The Religious Zionist Party (an outgrowth of the original National Religious Party), which ran as a combined outfit of the eponymous group, Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power), and Noam, a religious, anti-LGBTQ party, pulled in fourteen seats, more than double its tally in the last elections, held the previous year. Its success—and the fact that its seats would be fundamental to keeping the governing coalition, under Netanyahu’s Likud, intact—guaranteed the Kahanists significant leverage in negotiating which ministerial appointments they would receive, and granted them a level of power and influence that Kahane would only have been able to dream of.

Otzma Yehudit, headed by the former Kach activist Itamar Ben Gvir, whom Netanyahu put in charge of the country’s combined police forces on both sides of the Green Line, owed its unprecedented success to numerous causes. Not least among these was the unrest in May 2021 that swept across both sides of the Green Line, and especially in Israel’s so-called “mixed cities,” where severe intercommunal violence brought up terrifying echoes of the Balkans in the early- to mid-1990s. But another factor, and the snowball effect it produced, would end up being far more consequential. The repeated election cycles of 2019-2022 were driven largely by Netanyahu’s attempts to stay in power despite being indicted on several corruption charges, to the extent that

each election campaign became a *de facto* referendum on Netanyahu—the devotion and antipathy he inspired overtaking other issues such as the occupation, the soaring cost of living, and the constant background noise of state and political violence in determining how many Israelis voted at the polls. Amid this political dysfunction, one of Netanyahu’s most consequential interventions on his own behalf was to repeatedly orchestrate mergers between Otzma Yehudit and other far-right religious Zionist parties, on the grounds that failing to do so might lead to the votes for the smaller parties such as Otzma Yehudit going to waste if they failed to pass the electoral threshold (which had been raised in 2014 to try and keep Palestinian parties out of the Knesset). In the three elections held between April 2019 and March 2020, these efforts failed to either grant Netanyahu the majority he needed to form a stable government, or to bring Ben Gvir into the Knesset. Yet the March 2021 elections, though finally ousting Netanyahu from power, also brought Ben Gvir into parliament for the first time—and he became an instant star. The unrest across the country shortly after the elections, and Ben Gvir’s instinct for racist provocation, saw him consistently in the headlines and a frequent guest on Israeli nightly news shows. As his exposure increased, so did his popularity—until, in November 2022, he and the rest of the Religious Zionism-Otzma Yehudit slate pulled in over half a million votes, taking almost eleven percent of the vote share. Once again, Netanyahu had personally devoted time and energy to ensuring that the parties would run together; this time, however, the fear was that it would be votes for Religious Zionism, and not those for Otzma Yehudit, that would go to waste.

The parallels and divergences between the fate of a Kahanist party in the 1980s and the 2020s are stark. As Kach’s sole member of Knesset from 1984 to 1988, Kahane was the subject of informal boycotts by both the media and his fellow Knesset members; in 2021, Ben Gvir

became a media sensation. In 1988, Kach's racist platform was the reason given for its barring from the elections; in the late 2010s and early 2020s, an almost identical party platform was allowed to stand. And while Kach's surging popularity in the polls in the wake of its Knesset debut helped mobilize efforts to exclude the party, the comparable rise of Otzma Yehudit led to outreach and offers of partnership.

With the results of the 2022 election, and Netanyahu's role in bringing them about, Kahanism's transformation from its roots as an American import to a fully entrenched Israeli movement with genuine political heft was complete. In this, a familiar pattern was at work, which had been repeated often over the prior decades: far-right groups sprung up in response to perceived setbacks to or insufficient progress toward their vision; the state moved rightward and absorbed elements of those same groups' ideology and personnel, until the next juncture that prompted further radicalization; and so on. In the wake of Ben Gvir's success, and his shift to dog-whistle rhetoric (for example, substituting the word "Arabs" for "terrorists" when calling for deportations and the death penalty) in order to escape a potential election ban, his former party partners Baruch Marzel and Michael Ben-Ari—both also Kahane disciples—threatened to launch a new party after declaring Otzma Yehudit insufficiently radical, beginning the cycle anew.⁷²⁰ Yet even as Kahanism edged toward the mainstream, it remained, at least until very recently, a useful avatar for extremism that the parliamentary far right could claim to reject when it erupted—as in

⁷²⁰ "Ultrationalists launching party to the right of Ben Gvir's extremist Otzma Yehudit," *Times of Israel*, November 17, 2022, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ultranationalists-launching-party-to-the-right-of-ben-gvirs-extremist-otzma-yehudit/>. Marzel, who succeeded Kahane at the head of Kach after the latter's assassination, and Ben-Ari were both previously barred from running for the Knesset due to their history of racist incitement. The pair collected signatures for their proposed new party at the annual memorial ceremony for Kahane, which Ben Gvir also attended.

the case of Goldstein, Yigal Amir, and, until he became politically useful, Ben Gvir—into spectacular violence.⁷²¹

The triumph of Kahanism is, however, just the latest victory for the transnational Jewish far right. Netanyahu's hold over Israeli politics, and the country's seeming inability to sustain a functioning government without him in power, must surely count as the transnational movement's most consequential—and historically-rooted—victory. And in that, it bears revisiting the period immediately following Netanyahu's first prime ministerial victory in 1996.

Futureproof

Netanyahu was, in so many ways, an ideal figurehead to lead the transnational Jewish far right's ongoing maturation and mobilization in response to both the Oslo era and the global political realignment that followed the end of the Cold War, and as the Israeli far right in particular sought to reassert control after Labor's anomalous victory in 1992. He embodied the institutional and ideological heritage of the pre-World War II Jewish far right—secular-minded, territorially-maximalist and ethnically-exclusionist—while advancing the increasingly messianic and radical ambitions of religious-Zionist settlers and their American backers. He was as adept at speaking

⁷²¹ Other than the incident involving Rabin's car weeks before his assassination (see ch. 5), Ben Gvir was notorious for both his convictions over incitement to racism and support for a terrorist organization (Kach), as well as for having a portrait of Baruch Goldstein hanging on his living room wall in the extremist settlement of Kiryat Arba. In a television interview in 2011, Ben Gvir described Goldstein as a "hero"; in 2019, he was filmed refusing to take the picture down. In 2020 he finally relented after repeated badgering from potential election partners, with then-Jewish Home head Naftali Bennett most prominently professing himself unable to stomach working with someone who displayed a photo of "a man who murdered 29 innocent people." Jacob Magid, "Bennett resists merger with Kahanist Ben Gvir, despite pressure from Netanyahu," *Times of Israel*, January 15, 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/bennett-resists-merger-with-kahanist-ben-gvir-despite-pressure-from-netanyahu/>. In 2013, while serving as a minister in Netanyahu's government, Bennett infamously told an Israeli reporter that "I've killed many Arabs in my life—and there's no problem with that." Ariel Ben Solomon, "Bennett under fire for comments about killing Arabs," *Jerusalem Post*, July 30, 2013, <https://www.jpost.com/diplomacy-and-politics/bennett-under-fire-for-comments-about-killing-arabs-321467>.

to audiences of influential American-Jewish funders and policy wonks as he was at connecting with his base of voters, whether in direct-to-camera messages beamed through television sets and, later, social media, or in public walkabouts up and down the country. He had mastered the art of populism, drawing in so many of the activists, supporters, and donors who had previously backed Kahane and giving their hopes and ideology the patina of respectability by way of his own electability.

Moreover, for a man who had first cultivated his public profile as an expert on terrorism, and in particular on framing Islam as a threat to Western civilization that Israel was uniquely equipped to ward off, the coming dominance of neoconservative politics—brought to its apex by the election of George W. Bush in 2000—would only serve to further enshrine Netanyahu’s position at the head of a transnational Jewish far right that had increasingly coalesced around the “clash of civilizations” narrative that replaced the Cold War’s old enmities. Yet the thing that Netanyahu perhaps affirmed most of all—even more than Kahane before him—is the extent to which the Israeli- and American-Jewish far right were never distinct entities, notwithstanding the various local and domestic struggles that each waged over the course of the twentieth century, and continue to wage today. Despite the territorial maximalism that has always anchored the ideology of the Jewish far right, and the intensive focus on borders and the sacralization of the land itself, there has always been an internationalist dimension to the movement: one that has, from the start, navigated the conflict between relying on the diaspora and the calling for the liquidation of the exile; adapted to the changing templates and norms of geopolitics and citizenship as the world has become increasingly globalized; and consistently leveraged its own transnationalism en route to hegemony. The founders of the U.S. chapter of Betar, which

formally institutionalized the transnational far right, as well as the early Irgun activists who set up shop in the U.S. in the 1930s, understood well the importance of having a dedicated and influential contingent of far-right American Jews in situ; so, too, did Menachem Begin, Meir Kahane, and Benjamin Netanyahu. And it is that consistent transnational engagement that has been key to the far right's success in Israel—not because, as many Israeli observers clearly drew comfort in believing over the decades, extremism and violent ultranationalism were American imports, but because the American-Jewish far right, thanks to how the institutional American-Jewish community evolved over the twentieth century, was so willing and able to provide financial and political support. To that support was added, in the final third of the twentieth century onward, two increasingly dominant political frameworks—neoconservatism and neoliberalism—that the Israeli far right would come to draw on more and more in the opening decades of the twenty-first century. During the period with which this dissertation concludes, neoconservatism and neoliberalism were dominant on the American-Jewish far right, and making inroads at the edges of the Israeli far right. Today, they form foundational shared political ideologies of the transnational Jewish far right—bolstered by a network of think tanks, educational institutions, funds, and journals that are based in, or at least work across, both countries. And some of the Israeli outfits modeled on conservative American institutions, such as the Kohelet Policy Forum (KPF)—which was founded by a New Yorker, and has close ties to Likud—have been instrumental in the codification of ethnic discrimination, domination, and erasure, most significantly in the passage of the 2018 Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People, which was heavily worked on and promoted by the KPF. (Yechezkel Leiter, a senior KPF fellow when the law was passed, is a former JDL member and a former chief of staff to

Netanyahu.)⁷²² This new law did not, of course, mark a shift in far-right Israeli policies, only their transition from *de facto* to *de jure*; but it did, nonetheless, show the potency of hybridized Israeli and American conservatism, and its ability to deliver—via the legitimizing avenue of political procedure—a law that could have sat quite comfortably within a Kach manifesto. To revisit Federico Finchelstein’s visual template for the evolution of far right politics, this was, essentially, Kahanism without the aesthetics.

None of this is to say that there has not remained a place for the “uniformed,” more openly fascist segments of the Israeli far right. But as the 2021 and 2022 Israeli elections proved, they can no longer be considered solely an extra-parliamentary movement. Rather, what we have witnessed is the culmination of many decades of complex engagement between the Israeli government and grassroots far-right movements, which at times resembled a cat-and-mouse game and at others displayed deep collaboration and ideological alignment. Now, those two forces have fused into a joined-up movement whose leader, Ben Gvir, worked his way up from being a highly visible member of a banned terrorist organization protesting against the Israeli government, to being the parliamentary leader of that same movement, albeit under a different organizational name.

Yet the route taken by Ben Gvir is not unprecedented on the transnational Jewish far right, as this dissertation has shown—even if it marked a breakthrough for a formally Kahanist-identified group, with its deeply intertwined American and Israeli heritage. Indeed, from the very earliest days of the institutional Jewish far right, stretching all the way back to the founding of Betar USA, there has been a consistent path beaten out by young, radical, far-right Jewish

⁷²² Friedman, *Zealots for Zion*, 36.

activists who cut their teeth in Revisionist or Revisionist-inspired groups—whether in the U.S. or in the Middle East—and later made their way into the Knesset, whether in the opposition or, more often, the governing coalition. From the “intellectual elite” of the Irgun delegation to the U.S. who ended up serving in Begin’s Herut, to Begin himself; and from Geulah Cohen and Yitzhak Shamir to Meir Kahane, the ideological and organizational apparatuses established by the earliest institutions of the Revisionist movement have consistently produced powerful Israeli politicians, whose influence has been felt in parliament and in the American and Israeli street, and in wider communal politics on both sides of the Atlantic. Benjamin Netanyahu is perhaps the exception in not having been formally affiliated with one of those early organizations, but the leadership of his father, Benzion Netanyahu, in the transnational institutional movement during those years means that Netanyahu junior, too, is deeply connected to that formative period.

That movement-to-government path was not, as we have seen, always straightforward. Internal power struggles within the Zionist movement, and similar battles within Israeli politics, often hampered the far right’s pursuit of their goals; so, too, did the movement’s frequent difficulty in raising the funds—especially in the U.S.—to match their lofty ambitions. The events of the late 1940s and early 1950s outpaced the far right, in both its grassroots and parliamentary guises; in both countries, the obstacles created by the rapid recalibration of priorities, personnel, and tactics proved insurmountable during the movement’s “lean years” until the Six-Day War. In particular, as discussed in chapter 2, the very nature of the transnational relationship was thrown into doubt with Israel’s establishment, with activists in the U.S. and politicians in Israel struggling to agree on how, why, and to what extent the movement in each country should be in dialogue with and relation to one another. The enthusiasm, urgency, and desperation of the World

War II period and the fight for statehood gave way to a lack of direction, in-fighting, and repeated failed attempts to win political power in Israel. Only with the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, the Sinai, and the Golan Heights during the 1967 war did the transnational movement rediscover the sense of destiny it had mislaid during the state-building era, and see, once more, an opportunity to make good on its dreams of territorial expansion, ethnic and religious domination, and the sweeping away of its political rivals. Those aims would be accelerated by the rise of the political far right in both countries the following decade; by the emergence of new far-right grassroots leaders, from Meir Kahane to the religious right-wing settlers of Gush Emunim and the Jewish Underground; and, as noted above, by the growth of neoliberalism and neoconservatism. Throughout all the domestic and international upheavals, leading members of the transnational Jewish far right shared an ability to sustain and mobilize a core cohort of true believers, even during moments when the wider movement was adrift; an awareness of the need to speak to the identities and concerns of their constituents and supporters on both sides of the Atlantic; and an innate understanding of the benefits of building power in both the U.S. and Israel. They shared, too, a deep undercurrent of racism and a masculinist conception of nationhood, homeland, and the utility of violence, which they variously embraced, perpetrated, or coyly distanced themselves from, depending on the circumstances. And with the exception of Netanyahu, they also shared a predilection for militarist and, in some cases, fascist aesthetics, rooted in their common institutional heritage of the early Revisionist groups. Finally, the leaders and organizations of the transnational Jewish far right knew how to respond to crisis: how to make sure that the outrage and resentment annealed into action and not despair; how to by turns antagonize, outflank, and collaborate with the Israeli government, often en route to

eventually being co-opted by that government; and how to ensure their steady progression to mainstream political and institutional power, from the Knesset in Jerusalem to the neoconservative think tanks and American-Jewish establishment institutions of Washington, D.C., and New York. And that, ultimately, led to the contemporary landscape we now see—of a far-right movement, with self-identified Kahanist elements, which continues to consolidate its hold over Israeli politics; which is more entrenched than ever in Israeli society, including in the occupied West Bank; and which has seemingly limitless financial resources to draw on, thanks to a powerful donor class that emerged in the U.S. over the past few decades. That same contingent has not only poured tax-exempt funds into pet far-right projects at home and abroad, while holding increasing sway over the agendas of the mainstream American-Jewish establishment, but has also been instrumental in establishing the parallel educational, policy, and media institutions in both countries that have undergirded efforts to further consolidate the transnational conservative movement. With Netanyahu’s return to power, bringing with him a Kahanist party that won over a record number of voters, the past and present of the Jewish far right merged to devastating effect—and, in so doing, presented a window onto the movement’s future.

Further avenues for research

This dissertation has covered a broad sweep of the twentieth century across two countries and therefore has, inevitably, left open significant areas for further inquiry. From a geographic perspective, there is much more of the transnational far right to be explored. For the reasons given in my introduction, I chose to focus on the U.S. as my diaspora country, and within that, especially the east coast, but there are other diaspora Jewish communities with far-right elements

that more than merit their own research and analyses. From a purely numerical perspective, France is an obvious place to start, being home to the fourth-largest Jewish community in the world (after Israel [within the Green Line], the U.S., and the occupied territories [including East Jerusalem]). Moreover, the majority of French Jews hail from France's former colonial territories in North Africa, which—especially given both France's divide-and-conquer policies toward Muslims and Jews in its colonies, and the animating force of Islamophobia on the Jewish far right—gives the community a distinct character and history, which would undoubtedly provide new insights into the transnational Jewish far right. Beyond France, there is also an active far-right Jewish movement in Canada—and the enticing potential for setting research there against the backdrop of far-right Québécois separatist groups—that warrants further inquiry, as do, of course, Jewish far right groups across other parts of the U.S.

There is also more work to be done on the gendered aspects of Jewish far-right ideology. As I noted in my introduction, the literature in this regard—with some notable and excellent exceptions—is disappointingly thin. Although I have endeavored to highlight how gender, nationalism, and racism have intersected in the history of the transnational Jewish far right—particularly at its inception and in the worldview of Meir Kahane—there is a whole array of studies to be written about how ideas surrounding masculinity have shaped far-right Zionism over the decades; the part women have played in the movement and how their involvement has shaped and been shaped by conservative ideas about gender roles; and how these dynamics have—or haven't—differed across different local arms of the Jewish far right.

There remain unexplored, and rich, avenues of inquiry into the Jewish far right's place in the wider firmament of the global far right. The relationship between the Jewish far right and

Christian Zionism has begun peeking in at the edges of the studies about both, but the subject is ripe for a dedicated literature of its own. Equally, there remains much to be written about the character of the American-Jewish far right as a movement emanating from a non-dominant community that aims to mimic, integrate into, and give succor to the hegemonic far right—and how it compares to other non-dominant far-right movements in this regard, whether it be the supporters and fellow-travelers of the Indian Bharatiya Janata Party in the Hindu diaspora; the prominent presence of Latino men in the U.S. fascist street group the Proud Boys; or the branches of the Chinese Falun Gong movement that, in their anti-communist fervor, have fully thrown themselves in with Trumpian politics and conspiracy theories. At the state level, Israel’s steady integration into the rising global far-right alliance of the past twenty years—that has included, at various times, Hungary, India, Brazil, Poland, the U.S., and the Philippines—has been the site of growing interest and coverage, but our understanding of this process would benefit from a deeper historicization.

The “lean” years of the Jewish far right in the 1950s and the first of the 1960s—the post-statehood era—also deserve closer examination. There is a reasonable amount of material on the institutional actors of this period—whether Menachem Begin, his Herut party, or the embers of the pre-state militant groups—but less on the thought and action of grassroots groups in Israel and, in particular, in the diaspora. More work here could illuminate further the ideological lineages of the Jewish far right precisely at a moment when they had never been further from institutional or popular power—a state of affairs that turned out to be a historical aberration. Additional research in this area could even suggest new periodizations in the history of Zionism and Jewish politics, ones that stray further from the long shadow of state power.

Finally, as I mentioned in chapter 5, more contemporary evolutions in the Jewish far right—especially the Israeli far right—are ripe for investigation. In particular, the genealogy of the chardalim, the hilltop youth, and the loose network of extremist yeshivas throughout the occupied West Bank represent new directions in the development of the Jewish far right, and moreover raise further questions about the involvement and impact of especially American Jews in these movements. As mentioned in the final chapter, one of the spiritual leaders of this new extreme right—Yitzchak Ginsburgh—is an American immigrant, while the radical institutions that serve his students and their ideological and social cohort are often in receipt of American taxpayer dollars. As this new sharp edge of the Jewish far right creeps closer to the Knesset, investigating their history, ideology, and sources of support—as well as the institutional and ideological histories of their supporters—is more necessary than ever. As has been increasingly clear to me through the course of researching and writing this dissertation, the history of the Jewish far right—of its visions, its ideas, its phobias, its plans, and its tactics—lies heavy on the movement’s present-day adherents. And while tracing these threads cannot undo the decades of terror visited on the “enemies” of the Jewish far right, it may—with the will that insight can generate—contribute to mounting a response appropriate to the ongoing state of emergency in Israel-Palestine. After all, with Ben Gvir, a devout Kahanist, now in control of all police in Israel and the occupied territories, what are the histories of Kahane, Kach, Betar, and the Irgun if not memories flashing up in a moment of danger?

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