

The Withdrawal from Gaza: A Massacre Foretold

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It was all expected: both the massacre and the questions it raised. But behind the easy questions that practically posed themselves, much more difficult and unasked questions are hidden.

The General Security Service (Shabak, a.k.a. Shin Bet) has been warning for a long time that the “disengagement” from Gaza could lead to an outbreak of Jewish terrorism, aiming at preventing the evacuation of the settlements. It also outlined three possible scenarios: the murder of the Prime Minister, an outrage against the holy mosques on the Temple Mount and a massacre of Arabs.

Among these three possibilities, the massacre of Arabs is the easiest and most effective. It aims at causing riots and compelling the police to move forces away from the arena of the disengagement, thus preventing them from evacuating the settlements.

The murderous act of Eden Nathan-Zadeh does, indeed, conform to this model. He got on a bus going to an Arab town (Shefaram), killed four Israeli Arab citizens and was beaten to death by the enraged crowd. The police was compelled to move more than a thousand officers from the disengagement area in the south to Galilee in the north, making it easier for right-wing activists to infiltrate Gush Katif.

The easy questions arose at once. If the Shin Bet knew enough to warn of the danger, why did it not increase its surveillance of the extreme rightists, whose identity and haunts are known to it? After all, the murderer was staying in Tapuakh settlement, the snake-pit of the Kach militants, whose murderous character is notorious. The murderer himself was arrested several times in the course of extreme right-wing activities in the past. And why didn't the army act, in spite of the fact that the commanders of the murderer knew that he had deserted in protest against the disengagement, taking his rifle with him? Indeed, his mother, who foresaw what was coming, bombarded the army with requests to find him and take the weapon away from him.

These are the easy questions.

But there are other questions, whose answers are more complex.

Why are the Kach people allowed to strut around like the kings of the realm? The Kach group was officially declared a terrorist organization and outlawed some 12 years ago. This means that anyone belonging to it, supporting it or assisting it with money or in any other way, is legally considered a terrorist. (This is precisely the law under which Sheik Ra'ed Salah, the mayor of the Israeli Arab town Um-al-Fahem, was imprisoned for two years.)

Kach (“So” in Hebrew) is, by any standard, a religious-fascist group. It advocates the murder

of Arabs, revenge killings, the expulsion of all Arabs from Israel and Palestine and an extreme anti-democratic regime. It maintains a leader-cult for its founder, Meir Kahane, who was shot by an Arab in the United States, and sanctifies Baruch Goldstein, the man who committed mass-murder in the Hebron mosque.

But for years now, the Kach people have been roving the country without hindrance and have committed numberless outrages against Israeli Arab citizens and inhabitants of the occupied Palestinian territories. From time to time one of their thugs is arrested, only to be released again after a few days. If one of them is put on trial at all, the trial turns into farce. In this game of cat and mouse, it is not quite clear who plays the cat and who the mouse.

Worse still: throughout these years, the Kach people have been treated like TV stars. They voice their boasts and messages of incitement on air and are frequently interviewed, always with captions like "Kach activist", "Kahane Lives activist" or "Member of the former Kach". They appear at the funerals of victims of Palestinian attacks and trials of Arab defendants, and shout "Death to the Arabs". They use television openly as an instrument for recruiting new members and poisoning the minds of future recruits.

It is impossible to travel in Israel without coming across the face of Meir Kahane on posters and graffiti. Slogans like "Kahane Was Right" and "Death to the Arabs", with the emblem of the threatening fist, appear on many walls throughout the country, and especially in Jerusalem, Hebron and Kiryat Arba. Nobody takes the trouble to remove them.

How is this possible? Very simple: as in certain other countries, like Germany in the 20s and 30s (the hapless "Weimar Republic"), Police and judges treat the Fascists as "misguided patriots", "good fellows who got carried away", more in sorrow than in anger.

The simple truth is that the semi-secret government organs that have been overseeing the illegal settlement activities for decades, use the Kach people for their purposes. Only thus can one explain the existence of openly Kahanist settlements, one of which is the rotten apple (Tapuakh means apple).

A little bit more difficult to answer is the question concerning the "Repentant Jews": why do so many of the Jewish terrorists come from this group?

This is a sect within a sect that has given birth to some of the most dangerous Jewish political murderers.

The religious camp in Israel consists of two parts: The Haredim ("trembling before God"), who continue the tradition of Orthodox Judaism of the Diaspora, and Religious Zionism that developed in this country. The great majority of "Religious Zionists" constitute, for all practical purposes, a sect. They bear little resemblance to traditional Judaism. It can be said that they are a mutation of Judaism, made in Israel.

The Haredim have a highly ambivalent attitude towards the State of Israel. When Zionism was born in Europe, almost all the eminent rabbis cursed its founder, Theodor Herzl, accusing him of trying to supplant the Jewish religion with Jewish nationalism. The central theme of Zionism, the "Ingathering of the Exiles", was a cardinal heresy in the eyes of the Orthodox. Nowadays the Haredim are quite ready to milk the state for their purposes, but they forbid their pupils to celebrate Israel's Independence Day or respect its flag. And while many of their adherents have now been bitten by the nationalist bug, they were

conspicuously absent from the recent big demonstrations against the disengagement. Their rabbis have forbidden them to take part.

“Religious Zionism”, in contradistinction, has developed over the years into a messianic sect, much like the Zealots at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, some 1935 years ago. They have a direct line to God, Who tells them what to do. They “bring the Redemption” to put pressure on the messiah to come early. The settlements are their spearhead.

The “Repentant Jews” are an even more extreme sect. Traditional Judaism treats proselytes with suspicion (“Proselytes are as injurious to Israel as a scab”, the Talmud says) and its attitude towards secular Jews who suddenly become pious is not much different. Most of the “repentance rabbis” preach a nationalist, out-of-this world, mystic, extreme and unbridled creed that completely negates the democratic system and calls for a “faith-based state”.

This has been the breeding ground for most of the Jewish terrorists in recent years, the members of the various “Jewish undergrounds” and also the Shefaram murderer.

And the question is: why were these rabbis, some of them government employees, allowed to spread their venomous message, to poison the minds of young people, to incite against elected officials and to undermine the democratic system?

Another important question concerns the connection between the murderer and the opponents of the disengagement, and especially the so-called Yesha Council. (Yesha is the Hebrew acronym of “Judea, Samaria and Gaza”. The Yesha Council is the self-appointed leadership of the settlers and is conducting the present struggle against the Gaza withdrawal.)

When one of the Yesha leaders was asked about this in a television interview, he exploded with anger. The very question is a terrible insult, he retorted, offending their honor, criminalizing them. Really?

True, the Yesha leaders are very shrewd. They know that if their followers hurt soldiers or police, they will lose whatever public support they have. They preach non-violence in all the media and on every occasion. Their main slogan is “We Love You”. During their last two big demonstrations, they succeeded in reining in their flock. But anyone watching their demonstrations on TV saw the Kach people there flying the banners of Kahane. The presence of Repentant Jews, easily recognizable by their clothes and behavior, was very noticeable. The Yesha leaders seemed to have no objection to their presence.

Also, the Yesha leaders have never distanced themselves from the messages of incitement voiced by the extreme rabbis, who curse the Prime Minister, the government and the Knesset in a language that sows the seed of disaster in the minds of their followers. They cannot argue that they are unaware of the possible consequences: the murder of Yitzhak Rabin is a warning that no one can ignore.

When the Yesha leaders appeared on TV immediately after the Shefaram massacre, they mouthed the usual condemnation, but in mid-sentence they turned to the disengagement dispute and blamed Ariel Sharon for all the crimes.

The Tapuakh people claim that the murderer did not stay at their settlement recently, but had moved to Gush Katif. In the letter which the murderer wrote to his commander before

deserting, he declared that he was not prepared to take part in the evacuation of the settlers there. And most importantly: the timing of the outrage itself leaves no doubt that it was aimed against the disengagement.

No verbal laundry can clear the Yesha Council from the responsibility for this act and the acts that will surely follow. The more the “civil disobedience” campaign of the extreme right proves a failure, the more the even-more-extreme right will turn to murderous violence.

Is it an accident that Yesha rhymes with Pesha, the Hebrew word for crime?

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