

## ***Gush Emunim* and the Israeli Settlers of the Occupied Territories: A Social Movement Approach**

by LT Mark Munson, USN

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### **Introduction**

Settlement of the territories occupied by Israel after the 1967 Six-Day War has been the subject of much international controversy and domestic political contention in Israel over the past forty years. The most prominent organization advocating Israeli settlement in the territories has been *Gush Emunim* (the Bloc of the Faithful), originally established in 1974. While *Gush Emunim*'s zenith as an actual political group occurred in the mid-seventies, the term is also often used to describe the constellation of like-minded individuals and groups clustered around a specific messianic ideology, which has played an influential role in Israeli politics since 1967. The success of *Gush Emunim*, as well as its adherents and allies, in pursuing aggressive, religiously motivated settlement in *Eretz Israel* (the Biblical "Land of Israel"), can be assessed through the application of Social Movement Theory. Although composed primarily of figures along the religious fringe of Israeli society, advocates of settlement have used the political opportunities offered by elite divisions within the Israeli political system. The movement's mobilizing structures have included state-funded religious schools, military units, and both formal and informal social networks. Their millenarian ideology has been framed in terms palatable to the broader Israeli public, particularly by relying on nostalgia for pre-state Labor Zionism, as well as arguments which claim that the settlements enhance Israeli security. Skillful exploitation of available political opportunities and mobilizing structures, coupled with clever ideological framing have allowed the movement to implement its program of settlement within the occupied territories in the face of substantial domestic and international opposition. The ensuing radicalization and terrorism of members of the movement can also be explained in terms of Social Movement theory, as extremists marginalized by the movement's successful engagement in the political process have been radicalized and driven to violence by "accommodations" such as Camp David, Oslo, and Israel's 2005 unilateral withdrawal from Gaza.

### **Political Opportunities**

The asymmetric power of the settler groups within Israeli politics over the past forty years lies in their ability to exploit fissures within political elites. Over the years *Gush Emunim* members and settlement advocates have variously acted from within, or have allied themselves with, parties such as the National Religious Party (NRP), Likud, and Tehiya, while also engaging in "extra-parliamentary" activities.<sup>[1]</sup> The impact of those activities has been significant, because they ensured that the "settlements could constrain the government" and "trump international pressure" in a manner unmatched by other players on the Israeli political scene.<sup>[2]</sup> The presence of the settlers in the volatile West Bank has ensured ability to "turn the occupied territories into hell, if they only want to. Therefore, even cabinets hostile to the radical right cannot afford to ignore its

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attitudes and demands.”[3] Opponents of settlement have historically proved politically weaker than the settlers. “They could not create facts. They could not carry out a wildcat withdrawal, or undo a settlement.”[4]

Immediately after the 1967 war, the government established precedents through which motivated religious zealots could exploit the ambivalence of the government regarding future settlement of the occupied territories. Kfar Etzion, near Bethlehem, was initially approved by then-Prime Minister Levi Eshkol’s as a “military outpost.”[5] The Kiryat Arba settlement, established in 1968 near Hebron, set a future template for illicit settlement throughout the occupied territories, a process in which the “the settlers create “facts”; the government responds half-heartedly, with some of its ministers openly supporting the settlers; the government reaches a compromise; the settlers create another “fact.””[6]

By the 1969 Knesset elections, the core individuals and groups of what was to become Gush Emunim perceived the opportunity to exploit the political process and pursue their religious goal of settlement throughout all of Eretz Israel. Their first step was to challenge the supremacy of NRP’s “aging, moderate leaders,” hoping to transform Israel’s leading religious Zionist party from an unquestioning and dependable partner of Israel’s governing Labor Alignment, to a radical party whose agenda was primarily driven by the goal of settlement in the territories.[7] Gush itself was founded to “to impose their agenda” on the NRP, and the pledge by Golda Meir’s second government (elected in 1973) to call new elections before any decisions were made regarding the territories explicitly demonstrated the decisive role of the NRP’s Gush faction.[8]

The contentious nature of Israeli governments in general, composed of unwieldy and undisciplined coalitions of multiple independent lists, parties, and political fiefdoms, representing a variety of different (and often conflicting) interest groups during the best of times, was magnified under Yitzhak Rabin’s mid-seventies government, which was dominated by intense personal and political feuds and rivalries. The government did not maintain a unified policy, and was unable to “decide on what “territorial compromise” and “defensible borders” meant without risking a split.”[9] Gush was able to exploit feuds within the government,[10] the ambitions of politicians opposed to settlement if cooperation with the settlers created projects which “gave their ministries more responsibility,”[11] and the relative autonomy of aides and bureaucrats to execute settlement-related policies.[12] The three leading personalities within the cabinet all worked closely with individuals close to the settlers: Rabin’s special advisor for defense was Ariel Sharon, Peres aide Yuval Ne’eman directed “Gush operations openly from the defense ministry,” and foreign minister Yigael Allon “was the patron of Rabbi Levinger of Kiryat Arba fame.”[13]

Whether Peres was the decisive agent behind settlement or a rube that was exploited by settlers who “knew how to extract the maximum from the deep hostility between the two leaders and their inability to cooperate” remains debatable.[14] Peres’ biographer has argued that he encouraged settlement only in strategic locations far from Palestinian population centers,[15] while Rabin claimed that Peres encouraged “defiance of his own government’s policy” by publicly advocating “settlement everywhere.”[16] Rabin’s claims reflect a commonly-held belief that the Prime Minister was outmaneuvered by Gush and his own subordinates, particularly Peres.[17] Peres held “innumerable meetings” with the settlers during this era, and provided both “concrete help” and “symbolic support” to the movement.[18] His attitude, not particularly unique among many Israeli politicians of the era, is best exemplified by a statement he made during one of the many violent stand-offs over attempts to establish a settlement at Sebastia, near Nablus in the northern West Bank (Samaria), saying that “this is an illegal, unacceptable act, but these guys are not professional criminals or lawbreakers. They’re moved by national motives.”[19] Regardless of Peres’ motive in tolerating illegal settlement, his role (or that of his aides) in the military’s dilatory response to the Sebastia demonstrations was critical, as that slowness provided just enough crucial time for the settlers to organize the logistics of the demonstrations, and gain critical media attention.[20]

The settlers “attributed the Likud victory in the 1977 elections to themselves and their increasing influence on Israeli politics.”[21] Although not from the same religious milieu as the settlers, new Prime Minister Menachem Begin “identified with the Gush Emunim’s combination of mystical attachment to areas of ancient Israel and practical steps to ensure a continued Jewish presence in the region.”[22] Initially, the Begin government’s friendliness with the settlers was demonstrated by the Prime Minister meeting with Gush’s leaders “more than with any other group of citizens in Israeli society.”[23] Likud’s victory “brought an end to the cautious settlement policy of the Labor administration,” and signaled the start of “massive settlement of the entire West Bank.”[24]

The honeymoon period between Begin’s Labor government and Gush Emunim soon ended, however. Although it would be inaccurate to describe Begin’s government (or any subsequent Israeli government, particularly the Likud ones) as anti-settlement, he did pursue a variety of policies (particularly peace with Egypt) which conflicted with the specific aims of Gush’s religiously-inspired platform. Those programs helped cause “the religious radicals” to revert “to confrontation when coalition politics or diplomatic pressures led the government to slow or even dismantle settlements”[25]

Gush Emunim successfully exploited political fractures within the Israeli political system, which were particularly pronounced during Rabin’s first government. Taking advantage of support from members of Rabin’s cabinet and the Likud opposition, Gush was able to achieve its goals of settlement in the occupied territories on their own terms, not those of a government somewhat sympathetic to settlement, but primarily within the context of a specific defense policy.

## Mobilizing Structures

Religious settlers such as Gush Emunim have historically exploited multiple mobilizing structures to advance their political program in Israel. Despite the prominence of many of its members and adherents in earlier settlements established immediately after the Six-Day war, the actual Gush Emunim organization itself only rose to prominence during protests of Henry Kissinger’s “shuttle diplomacy” after the 1973 war.[26] Much of Gush’s strength then lay in its tight-knit homogenous core group of young (93 percent under-45 in the mid-seventies), native-born (68 percent), religious (92 percent), educated (66 percent post-secondary), and Ashkenazi (82 percent) activists. The leaders of the group came from “the same yeshivas, the same rabbis, the same scriptures, the same idiom.”[27] That core group used personal connections to engender support, bringing into the fold “people—their relatives, friends, classmates, and the like.”[28] Despite having a relatively small vanguard, the movement was able to tap into supportive elements of the Israeli population, deriving power “from the intensive reciprocal relationships between the hard core and the soft periphery, which at any moment could be jump-started and recruited for action.”[29]

Among the most important institutions for mobilizing future members of the movement were religious schools, particularly the *Yeshivat Merkaz Harav*, and groups such as the NRP-affiliated youth movement *Bnei Akiva*. [30] Adherents of the movement historically “become part of the Gush usually because they *grow up* into it. The long process of socialization often starts at home, and continues through kindergarten, religious primary school, high school yeshiva, Yeshivat Hesder or advanced yeshiva.”[31] The “knitted skullcaps” who were graduates of Merkaz Harav or alumni of Bnei Akiva were then able to increase their influence within the movement itself and the larger religiously observant portions of Israeli society by assuming “a dominant role in the state-run religious school system.”[32] Religious schools were (and still are) important not only because they provide an opportunity to spread the ideology of settlement to the youth, but also because they also provide tangible assets such as buildings and vehicles, allowing the schools to “bus their students to right wing demonstrations and justify this on the grounds that this is part of the process through which their students participate in legitimate democratic activities.”[33]

The movement also maintained its influential role in the lives of its adherents through “the *hesder* yeshivot that mixed study and army duty.”[34] These schools, “which were established beginning in 1964 and were granted official status two years later, offered religious youth a cadre that combined study and military service,” and offered a form of legitimization for religiously observant Israelis that have historically felt socially-marginalized by the dominant secular Israeli society.[35]

Advocates of settlement also created institutions which have existed independently both from the political parties that Gush Emunim aligned itself with over time, and the government bureaucracy tasked with establishing settlements in the occupied territories. Despite most settlement’s openness to non-observant residents, a few, particularly Ofra, often described as the “home of the settler nobility,” mandate “(i)nflexible membership rules, strict adherence to uniform construction, and advanced and sophisticated community management” as a “model... in its external appearance and its human and ideological quality.”[36] In addition, during the seventies, the movement used its base of support in “synagogue communities, religious PTAs, and Bnei Akiva alumni circles” to form branches across “the country to broadcast the message of the movement as widely as possible and recruit supporters and future settlers.” This network, operating outside of formal political circles, was maintained even after the election of an enthusiastically settlement-friendly Likud government in 1977.[37]

These schools, military units, synagogues, informal social networks, and actual Gush Emunim institutions played a critical role in mobilizing support for the settler movement. The close-knit religious and social group of Gush Emunim used these structures and institutions to provide both ideological and logistical support to the movement, providing both a functional ideological framework and the actual tools which enabled successful protest.

## Framing

The ideology of settler movements such as Gush Emunim is based on a messianic form of Orthodox Judaism derived from the teachings of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, the Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi in Palestine from 1921.[38] Kook was not a Zionist, but created a religious ideology which reconciled the secular Zionist project with messianic Judaism. That ideology, developed and taught by Kook and his son at the influential Merkaz Harav Yeshiva in Jerusalem for decades, “was enchantingly simple: the Land of Israel to the People of Israel according to the Torah of Israel.”[39] Although pursued by secular men for secular aims, the Zionist project fulfilled God’s will by reclaiming the Jewish inheritance. Kookist thought was compatible with secularism, as long as the Jews “sanctify every single acre of land that was promised to Abraham by God.”[40] According to Kook, “Zionism was thus a stage in God’s plan,” and the secular Zionist pioneers were “good sinners,” “principled evildoers,” and “the lights of chaos.”[41]

To the Kookists, the 1967 war validated their belief in Zionism as the fulfillment of a sacred Jewish mission, while also providing a pragmatic justification for Jewish settlement in Eretz Israel. The war was not just a conflict between states, as “God had simply forced Jews to liberate their homeland. It was God’s will that Nasser sent his troops to Sinai, that diplomacy failed. God “hardened the heart of Hussein,” just as he once hardened the heart of Pharaoh to redeem the children of Israel.”[42] The believers’ perception of the opportunity provided by the war and the occupied territories differed drastically from that of Israel’s political and military leaders. Rather than the conquered territories serving as a buffer zone or bargaining chips in a deal for peace with Israel’s neighbors, the settlers wanted to “shift the focus of Israeli settlement activity from a strategic perspective to one that insisted on the right of Jews to colonize all areas of the region as part of what had been Eretz Israel.”[43]

Despite the seeming inflexibility of Gush Emunim’s belief system, much of the movement’s success can be traced to its compatibility with other perspectives, particularly those of Israelis

primarily concerned with security threats. The esoteric nature of Kookist doctrine ensures that “almost any empirical situation can be seen to fit the grand scheme, and no fact can confuse or confute the theory,” therefore allowing members of the movement to variously accommodate with or challenge state policies in response to their needs at any given time.[44]

The strong religious foundation of Gush’s ideology is enhanced by its adaptability to the ideology of traditional secular Zionism and its use of techniques employed by the original Zionist settlers in Palestine. Israel’s political leaders during the 1960s and 1970s almost uniformly experienced their formative years in the collective settlements of the pre-Israel Palestinian *Yishuv*. Senior Labor leaders such as Prime Minister Levi Eshkol and Yigael Allon equated the desire of the new religious settlers with their past,[45] and used the same rationale to justify settlement after the 1967 war as that espoused by the old Zionist pioneers: “Settlers made worthless soil bloom; the land’s political status was so irrelevant as not to merit mentioning; settlements would actually push the Arabs to make peace.”[46] For the Israeli right-wing, meanwhile, the settlers represented “the idealism and self-sacrifice of the good old days,” and played “for them the same role the tiny Kibbutz movement once fulfilled for the Labor movement.”[47]

The identification of the post-1967 generation with the original Zionist settlers established a moral equivalency which allowed for a range of illegal acts both by the settlers and the government. Since “the British government was resisted in the 1930s and 1940s by the Zionist founding fathers,” resistance against the Israeli state was also acceptable.[48] In the settlers’ view, although settlement in Samaria in the West Bank “had been declared illegal by the government . . . it was as legitimate as the earlier “illegal” Jewish settlement in Palestine.”[49] The Israeli state itself had laid the foundation for “extralegal” settlement through its own activities. The razing of the Mughrabi Quarter in Jerusalem immediately after the 1967 war “fit the pre-state strategy of the Zionist left, which believed in speaking softly and ‘creating facts’: using faits accomplis to determine the political future of disputed land.”[50] The establishment of a few settlements following the 1967 war, coupled with the “destruction of the Mughrabi Quarter and in the expulsion of the Bedouin from the Rafiah Plain,” made any attempts for the government to insist “on the rule of law” in the future as simple “hypocrisy.”[51]

The settlers have successfully employed old Zionist rhetoric, referring to themselves as “a vanguard, not separatists,” using a Hebrew word for “vanguard” which “also means “pioneers,”” thus placing the group firmly in the tradition of the pioneers of Labor Zionism and not the “separatist” “Zionist right.”[52] In addition to successfully portraying themselves as the successors to the legitimate Zionist path, Gush leaders also created a framework for the future. The group provided a forum for “young religious Zionists” to overcome their previous marginalization by the dominant secular Israeli society and demonstrate both their “heroism in secular terms” and “religious greatness.”[53] It also provided a settlement ethos that better matched the post-sixties individualism of many Israelis than that of the old Labor socialism of the *Yishuv* and the post-independence era.[54]

One particularly effective way in which Gush Emunim and other religious advocates of settlement have framed their political enemies as both evil and mortally dangerous throughout Israeli history is through references to catastrophic events in Jewish history, particularly the Holocaust. During the mid-seventies, “Rabin’s concessions to Sadat were... compared to Chamberlain’s 1939 concessions to Hitler at Munich.”[55] In his memoirs Rabin describes an author who stated that “Kissinger deserved to meet the same fate as Count Bernadotte, the UN mediator who was assassinated in Israel in 1948 (by an earlier generation of right-wing fanatics).”[56] During one of the series of negotiations pursued by Peres during his tenure as Prime Minister in the eighties, a government lawyer told him “that a territorial concession would put him in the position of French General Petain, who collaborated with the Nazis in World War II and was later tried for treason.”[57] Similarly, after the Oslo Accords had been signed, “large segments of the religious right actively sought to de-legitimize both Rabin and his governing coalition by questioning their commitment to the Jewish nature of the state.”[58] Although “they were not the first to have used



them,” phrases such as “*Judenrein* and “Auschwitz Borders” have been commonly employed by groups such as Gush Emunim.[59]

Settlement advocates such as Gush Emunim have also successfully employed the language of security to gain support for their actions among the Israeli public. Popular desire to retain the occupied territories as a security barrier after the 1967 war enabled the establishment of settlements before their status had been fully resolved by either appropriate international or Israeli authorities. A survey taken at the time indicated that 91 percent of Israelis favored keeping East Jerusalem, 85 percent of the Golan Heights, 71 percent of the West Bank, and 50 percent of Sinai.[60] Those concerns, and the notion that Israeli control of the occupied territory enhances Israel’s security, has since been reflected in Israeli politics, as most adherents of right-wing parties in Israel are not religious fanatics at all, but rather “support their politics because they feel unsafe in a small Israel, are suspiciously hostile of the Arabs, and distrust the nation’s moderate leaders.”[61] The linkage between security and settlement is demonstrated by Gush’s failure to successfully frame another call for settlement, this time in Lebanon after the 1982 Israeli invasion. Gush calls for settlement in south Lebanon (settlement there would have been religiously justified within the context of Kookist thought, as this territory lay within the scope of the Biblical Israeli state), was roundly dismissed by the Israeli public and even most of the settler leadership, as civilian Israeli settlements provided little obvious security benefit, and would have been poor public relations for a state already faced with a hostile international community.[62] Instead, settlers have since emphasized the dangers of terrorism “to forge coalitions with both the right wing and centrist populations, for whom security and defense constitute the major issue on the national social and political agendas.”[63]

Among the most critical aspects of the settlers’ success is their ability to simultaneously present the settlements as enhancing Israel’s security while placing few demands on the entire Israeli population. The movement “does not interfere with the secular majority’s way of life. It does not threaten transportation or soccer games on the Sabbath. It lets the majority live its own life and enjoy its pleasures and demands allegiance on only one issue—the settlement of Eretz Israel.”[64] The lack of “any intention of religious coercion,” is exemplified by the transformation of many settlements into suburban commuter bedroom towns with many non-religious residents.[65]

Although Gush Emunim integrated itself into legitimate Israeli politics relatively easily, its activities have always involved “(p)olitical protest, illicit settlement, and civic disobedience.”[66] Forced evictions during the mid-seventies at Hawara, Elon Moreh, and especially Sebastia (from which settlers were evicted by the military seven times before a settlement was allowed at a nearby military base) presented images of “young skullcap-wearing settlers struggling with the soldiers,”[67] “hundreds of soldiers wrestling with the help of helicopters against the exhausted settlers,”[68] and “settlers demonstrating with their children by the roadside in the rain and in the cold.”[69] These images of suffering and settler victimization ultimately became fixed “in the archive of the collective consciousness.”[70] The Sebastia campaign itself “was designed from the outset as a media event in which the media became a central element, influencing the sequence of events,”[71] and the techniques refined at Sebastia provided a virtual playbook for future civil disobedience campaigns that has been used until today.[72]

Gush Emunim at its height in the seventies successfully framed their political program to the Israeli public by fusing the messianic religious message of the Kooks with a settler ethic inspired by the secular Zionists, wrapping the result in a package palatable to a broad spectrum of Israeli society that would normally view adherents of those beliefs as extremists on the lunatic fringe. The settlers “succeeded in promoting the general impression that their world view exemplified the nation’s most cherished values, mainly pioneer settlement and cultivation of the entire biblicohistorical Land of Israel.”[73] Simultaneously they portrayed themselves as the guarantors of Israel’s security, and victims of Rabin’s state security apparatus, while also evading public concerns with their extremist religious beliefs by not making any demands of mainstream secular Israeli society other than settlement of the territories.

## Radicalization

Social Movement theory predicts that participation in the political process will “moderate” most radicals, in the process marginalizing an incorrigible, ideologically-committed hard-core, which may resort to violence in a quest for continued relevance. Likud’s 1977 Knesset victory clearly removed from power any effective opposition to unrestrained settlement in the occupied territories, as well as any future need for groups such as Gush Emunim to participate in politics. However, to some truly committed members of the settler movement, the subsequent Camp David Accords represented Likud’s betrayal of their cause, and justified violent retaliation in order to restart the process of redemption through the settlement of Eretz Israel. Although very few of even the most extreme settlers seriously believed that Sinai was a viable location for Jewish settlement, the most fanatical advocates of the “Whole Land” were radicalized by Israel giving Sinai back to Egypt. Settlement of the occupied territories has continued under both Labor and Likud governments since the 1977, but a hard core advocating a specific version of religious and messianic settlement remained after the agreement.

Likud’s electoral success did start Gush’s decline as a social movement. Victory by the party advocating widespread settlement hurt the movement by removing the Rabin government as an enemy and focal point. Rabin’s administration which had fought settlement so ineffectively had provided a useful target to against which to organize.<sup>[74]</sup> In addition, the re-engagement in politics by Gush members under the guise of the new Tehiya Party during the eighties split the movement between those who supported “direct political action” in the context of a political party and those who preferred the old “extra-parliamentary” methods.<sup>[75]</sup>

Menachim Begin had earlier earned the support of Gush Emunim through his rhetorical allegiance to the doctrine of Greater Israel before his elevation to Prime Minister, but once in office, he proved to be something of a moderate, willing to trade territory for peace. Engagement with Sadat soon “exposed” a “rift between the radical rightists and Menachim Begin,”<sup>[76]</sup> and Gush’s hard-core adherents remained marginal as “long as the peace with Egypt was popular and Begin politically in control.”<sup>[77]</sup>

Before the eighties, despite a significant history of civil disobedience against Israeli authorities, Gush Emunim “had never openly embraced an ideology of violence,” instead advocating a utopian “peaceful and productive coexistence with the Arabs, under a benevolent Israeli rule.”<sup>[78]</sup> However, that attitude towards violence would soon change, with the group that would eventually be known as *Machteret Yehudit* (the Jewish Underground) first meeting in 1978 to discuss a plan to destroy Muslim holy sites on the Temple Mount in order to restart the process of redemption that peace with Egypt had stopped.<sup>[79]</sup>

Although the operation on the Temple Mount was never undertaken, the Underground did conduct a series of attacks including the maiming of several Palestinian mayors in response to the killing of Jews in Hebron in 1980, and an attack against the Islamic College in Hebron in retaliation for the murder of an Israeli student in 1983.<sup>[80]</sup> The group was finally captured when Shin Bet interrupted an attempt to blow-up Palestinian buses,<sup>[81]</sup> although some Shin Bet officials have reportedly claimed that previous attempts to arrest the terrorists as early as 1980 had been thwarted by “influential political and military officials.”<sup>[82]</sup>

The most important operation, however, particularly in terms of its religious significance, was the one that never happened, the planned destruction of the Temple Mount. The Underground leaders did not execute the plan against the Temple Mount because none “of the individuals involved was an authoritative rabbi,” and “all the rabbis approached... either refused their blessing or were at least very equivocal.”<sup>[83]</sup> That the lack of rabbinical approval was the decisive factor preventing the Underground from undertaking its most cherished goal demonstrates the centrality of religious belief to the most radical members of the settler movement.<sup>[84]</sup>



The aftermath of the Underground's arrest demonstrates that poverty or ignorance does not drive individuals to mobilization or violence. Among convicted members of the Underground interviewed for a survey of terrorists, none appeared "to be particularly underprivileged or undereducated."<sup>[85]</sup> The "people of the Jewish terror group did not arise from the murky margins of their community but in fact came from the best families of settler society and the heart of the believing establishment," in particular "from the preferred and well-funded settlements, from elite yeshivas, and from select units in the army."<sup>[86]</sup> The plotters either received light sentences, were paroled early, or if they had life sentences, "enjoyed exceptionally good conditions and went home on furloughs on the weekends."<sup>[87]</sup>

Social movement theory generally identifies radicalization as a primary driver of violence, but does not ignore the possibility for violence to increase in an environment already characterized by general instability and disorder. In addition to disenchantment with the political process after Camp David, the violence of the Underground can be traced to a tradition of vigilante justice meted out by the settlers in the occupied territories. The tradition of self-defense dates back to the pre-state *Yishuv* (the various, autonomous militias affiliated with political parties and their respective settlements merged and formed the Israeli Defense Force after statehood).<sup>[88]</sup> A 1983 survey of settlers indicated that 28 percent of male (5 percent of females) settlers "participated in some type of vigilante activity," and 63 percent agreed that settlers should "respond quickly and independently to Arab harassment," while only 13 percent "disapproved of vigilantism."<sup>[89]</sup> Regardless of whether settler vigilantism was more responsible for the Underground (or later attacks against both Israelis and Palestinians) than disenchantment with Camp David (or Oslo), it certainly played some enabling role in the violence of the nineties and beyond. One NGO's investigation of Baruch Goldstein's 1994 massacre of twenty-nine Palestinians at a mosque in Hebron expressed concern with settler vigilantism, indicating that "settlers seem largely immune from the legal consequences of criminal acts against Palestinians."<sup>[90]</sup>

Yigal Amir justified the next major attack, his 1995 assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, on religious grounds, using the same logic previously used by the Underground. Amir argued that the fate of "a person who hands over Sacred Jewish property to the gentile" and "a person who murders or facilitates the murder of Jews—shall be death."<sup>[91]</sup> Amir's views were not unique, even after Rabin's assassination, a late 1995 poll indicated that almost 5 percent of Israelis supported "violent protest" against the Israeli state due to the actions of the Rabin/Peres government.<sup>[92]</sup>

In spite of (or perhaps because of) the failure of Oslo to create lasting peace, the violent fringe of the settler movement has remained active. In 1999, "an Israeli man was banished from Jerusalem after police suspected he was planning to blow up the mosques on the Haram al-Sharif."<sup>[93]</sup> Adherents of the racist Kach party have "claimed responsibility for several attacks of West Bank Palestinians in which four persons were killed and two were wounded," and in 2002 "the current leader of Kach, Baruch Marzel, was arrested by Israeli police in connection with a plot to leave a trailer laden with two barrels of gasoline and two gas balloons outside a Palestinian girls' school in East Jerusalem."<sup>[94]</sup> Vigilantes remain on the West Bank, with "Hilltop People" engaging "in violent confrontations not only with the local Arabs, but also with the Israeli military."<sup>[95]</sup> To protest Ariel Sharon's unilateral disengagement from Gaza in 2005, an "army deserter" murdered four in "an Israeli Arab town," while another settler in the West Bank killed four Palestinians at a factory in Shiloh.<sup>[96]</sup>

The violence of the individuals and groups associated with the settler movement reflects tenets of Social Movement Theory. The radicals who formed the Underground were the extremist fringe of the movement most committed to the messianic form of the Eretz Israel doctrine, and therefore unable to accept peace with Egypt. The extremists of the nineties and 2000s were similarly unable to accept either peace with the Palestinians and Jordan or disengagement from Gaza. The violence of those fringe players had been enhanced by tolerance of vigilantism and settler defiance of state authority.

## Conclusion

Social movement theory explains both the success of Gush Emunim in making settlement of the occupied territories a reality, as well as the subsequent radicalization and terrorism of extremist elements in the movement after its marginalization following mainstream political success. By exploiting the political opportunities offered by elite divisions within Israeli politics, mobilizing structures which include both state-sponsored institutions and informal social networks, and ideological framing which makes the obscure objective of messianic occupation of the "Whole Land" acceptable to an Israeli public primarily preoccupied with security, Gush Emunim and its allies have ensured settlement of the territories which both satisfies their religious obligations while preventing any significant withdrawal from the territories.

## About the Author

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