

# JEWISH FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE STATE OF ISRAEL

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Jewish Fundamentalism in the State of Israel

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#### Abstract

*Fundamentalism is “a type of militantly conservative religious movement characterized by advocacy of strict conformity to sacred texts.”<sup>2</sup> Ordinarily, the entire blame for the violent acts that are associated with it is laid on the shoulders of Islam and its followers. Fingers are hardly pointed in the direction of Jewish fundamentalism, lest they are termed as anti-Semitic. Jewish Fundamentalism can also be referred to as Militant/Religious Zionism. Zionism in itself emerged as a political movement for the establishment of the national home for the Jews in what was earlier, the British controlled Palestine. While Judaism in itself is believed to be a peaceful religion by several of its followers, however, the Zionists in Israel, referring to certain texts within the scriptures, have indulged in deadly attacks within their country, in the settlement areas, as well as in Palestine.*

**Keywords:** Israel; Jewish; Militant; Religious; Fundamentalism

#### Zionism

For the Zionists, Palestine was to be their promised land, granted to them by God in his book Torah. Judaism for them was religion as well as a nationality. This became a point of contention with the more orthodox Jews. Religious Zionism has schooled its believers into submitting to the ideology of messianic Zionism according to which their Messiah would not reappear till the time both Israel and Palestine are cleansed of the non-Jewish population. Bloody and large-scale violence is deemed necessary to accelerate the return of their redeemer.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Munson (n.d.) for a detailed understanding of fundamentalism.

<sup>3</sup> See Amayreh (2003) to understand the heinous plans the Zionists have in store for the Palestinians.

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### Roots of Jewish Fundamentalism in the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures

A few examples could help highlight how Judaism does promote violence through its scriptures, which could have been taken as a source of inspiration by the militant Zionists. Deuteronomy (5th book of Torah), for example, commands-

#### 7:1

7 “When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you.”<sup>4</sup>

#### 20:16-18

“16 However, in the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. 17 Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the Lord your God has commanded you. 18 Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God.”<sup>5</sup>

Exodus (2nd book of Torah), commands in 34: 12-15, “12 Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you. 13 Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles. 14 Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. 15 “Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices.”<sup>6</sup>

According to the teachings of Halacha (Jewish Law), “A gentile permitted to reside in the Land of Israel must accept to pay a tax and suffer the humiliation of servitude and that such a gentile be held down and not raise his head against Jews.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Deuteronomy 7:1 New International Version (n.d) to understand the teachings of the Torah.

<sup>5</sup> See Deuteronomy 20:16-18 New International Version (n.d.) to understand the teachings of the Torah.

<sup>6</sup> See Exodus 34:12-15 New International Version (n.d.) to understand the teachings of the Torah.

<sup>7</sup> See Amayreh (2003) to understand the heinous plans the Zionists have in store for the Palestinians.

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Voltaire (A French Enlightenment Writer) had in 1764, made an interesting comparison between the Hebrew and Indian scriptures, "One remarks a singular contrast between the sacred books of the Hebrews, and those of the Indians. The Indian books announce only peace and gentleness; they forbid the killing of animals: the Hebrew books speak only of killing, of the massacre of men and beasts; everything is slaughtered in the name of the Lord; it is quite another order of things."<sup>8</sup>

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### The Study of Israel

Generally, the Six-Day war of 1973, is designated as the time when the seeds of Jewish fundamentalism were sown with the establishment of Gush Emunim (Block of the Faithful). However, in reality, militant/religious Zionism was in existence before the creation of the state of Israel. The Zionist militant groups consisting of members who had migrated to Palestine between 1848-1946 had consolidated themselves into a powerful force, before the UN's plan to partition Palestine into two halves was put forth. To ensure the achievement of their goal, they decided to resort to violent acts of terrorism, directed against the British, whom they thought of as traitors to their cause, as well as the Palestinian Arabs.

- Zionist militancy before the creation of Israel

The combined forces of the Left and Revisionist wings of the Zionist movement had waged brutal and bloody warfare against all those whom they perceived to be standing in their way of success. Ultimately, they won all the battles and the eventual war. Thomas Suárez in his work, 'State of Terror: How Terrorism Created Modern Israel' has argued, "Zionist terrorism ultimately dictated the course of events during the Mandate, and it is Israeli state terrorism that continues to dictate events today."<sup>9</sup> In the name of protecting themselves from anti-Semitism, a predominant phenomenon in the European continent, they sought to degrade, brutalize and dehumanize the Palestinians in the process.

Lehi/Stern Gang and Irgun were two important right-wing Zionist terrorist groups. Two of the most important leaders who headed them were Avraham Stern and Menachem Begin respectively. Lehi was operational from 1940-48 and Irgun, from 1931-1948. Yitzhak Shamir was one of the other leading individuals associated with Lehi. The former was believed to have been more extremist in its manner of operation. Both Begin and Shamir went on to become, after the creation of Israel, its 6th and the 7th Prime Ministers respectively.

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<sup>8</sup> See Crabtree (2017) to understand what Religious Fundamentalism entails.

<sup>9</sup> See Such (2017) to examine how the Zionist terrorism determined Palestine's fate.

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Lehi officials were responsible for sending several letter bombs to British government officials, prime ministers and members of the government.<sup>10</sup> They had broken off from Irgun because they believed that it was not indulging in actual terror.<sup>11</sup> Eliahu Bet-Zouri and Eliahu Hakim were the two assassins sent by Lehi in 1944 to assassinate Lord Moyne (the highest-ranking British official in the Middle East) in Cairo. Lord Moyne was assassinated according to Shamir, because he was against Zionism, of his hostility towards Jewish immigration and the creation of a national home for them. In reality, he was neither against Zionism nor was he anti-Semitic. In 1944, he had in fact, explicitly supported the Zionist movement for the creation of Israel.<sup>12</sup>

What irked them was his support for the Middle East Arab Federation (The proposal for the Middle East Arab Federation encompassed a merger of the Arab states. The Jewish population instead of being a part of a state carved out of Palestine, would be settled in the different member states of this federation. This would result in the Jews constituting a minority in each of the territories).<sup>13</sup> While these were the contributory factors which had culminated into this violent act, Lord Moyne, was in the end, collateral damage in Lehi's fight against the British Empire.

The assassins were hanged to death in March 1945. Three decades later, their bodies were returned to Israel and were honored with a state funeral. In 1982, their postage stamps were released and they were declared as martyrs who had fought for the independence of Israel.<sup>14</sup>

In January 1947, Lehi gave birth to the concept of truck bombs, as a violent tactic, which would later be adopted by various terrorist groups. A truck, filled to the brim with explosives deliberately crashed into the British police station based in Haifa, as a result of which four people lost their lives and over a hundred and forty were injured in this attack. In March 1948, Binyamina witnessed a

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<sup>10</sup> See Wistanley (2018) to understand about the Lehi group.

<sup>11</sup> See Perlmutter (1996) to understand about the Stern Gang.

<sup>12</sup> See Saidel (2012) to understand the psychology behind the assassination of Lord Moyne.

<sup>13</sup> See JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY(1942) to see how appalled the Zionist leaders were of settling Jews in Arab States outside Palestine.

<sup>14</sup> See Saidel (2012) to understand the psychology behind the assassination of Lord Moyne.

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horrific attack engineered by Lehi, in which a train was mined as a result of which forty people were injured and sixty people lost their lives.<sup>15</sup>

Irgun was another important terrorist group which had indulged in a wide range of terrorist activities during the course of its existence. In August 1939, a landmine placed by Irgun in Jerusalem killed two British officers. In September 1944, hundreds of British police officers were injured when members of this group attacked four police stations. In July 1946, it carried out one of its deadliest attacks on the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. The attack was symbolic in nature as this hotel housed the British administrative headquarters. Thus, an attack on this hotel was an attack on the British mandate of Palestine and the British Empire itself.

Bombs weighing a total of 350 kg were placed in the hotel, causing it to collapse. Ninety-one people were said to have lost their lives and over forty-five were injured. Out of the total victims, only thirteen were British. Most of the victims, in fact, had no direct relation to the mandate system and were nothing more than collateral damage. According to Professor Mordechai Golani (An Israeli historian), the act was “an act of terror that stained our history, leaving it scarred. We must bow our heads twice: one for the innocent men and women who were killed on a routine workday and once for shame at the attack.”<sup>16</sup>

Collectively, Lehi and Irgun had launched the Deir Yassir massacre in April 1948. A village consisting of around six hundred Palestinian Arabs came under attack as over a hundred villagers lost their lives. Machine guns and grenades were used to indiscriminately target the civilians. This incident had acted as a catalyst for the local population to flee from their homes in the fear of similar assaults by the Zionists in the future and the intervention of Arab states five weeks later. The purpose behind such a revolting act was to clear the blockade for the Zionist forces in their path towards securing their hold over Jerusalem.<sup>17</sup>

Yehuda Feder, a member of Lehi had penned down his thoughts on the massacre, which were highlighted in a documentary film, titled ‘Born in Deir Yassin’. Feder, without any hint of remorse, explained, “This was the first time in my life that at my hands and before my eyes Arabs fell. In the village, I killed an armed Arab man and two Arab girls of 16 or 17 who were helping the Arab who

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<sup>15</sup> See Revolvly (1948) to discuss about the Cairo-Haifa train bombing in 1948.

<sup>16</sup> See Aderet (2019) on King David Hotel Bombing.

<sup>17</sup> See Aderet (2017) for Testimonies from the Censored Deir Yassin Massacre.

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was shooting. I stood them against a wall and blasted them with two rounds from the Tommy gun. We confiscated a lot of money and silver and gold jewellery fell into our hands. This was a really tremendous operation and it is with reason that the left is vilifying us again.”<sup>18</sup>

- Fundamentalism in the Post-1973 era

The success of Israel in its wars against the collective might of the Arab world affirmed an important belief within the psyche of the Zionists: The control of the Jews over the occupied territories meant that the God had finally delivered on his word of granting the promised land to them.

Zionist fundamentalism after the formation of the state of Israel was visible with the emergence of Gush Emunim and later, The Jewish Underground. “The Land of Israel, for the People of Israel, according to the Torah of Israel,” was the slogan of the Block of the faithful. It clearly highlights that there was going to be no room for accommodation and acceptance of those who could not be neatly boxed into this category. These religious fundamentalist Zionists favored and engaged in the building of illegal settlements in the occupied areas of West Bank, Golan Heights and Gaza Strip while opposing even a partial withdrawal of the Israeli forces from areas such as the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. These settlements were believed to have been the Zionist way of protecting themselves against their enemy.<sup>19</sup>

In the interest of the Greater Israel, Yeshiva heads, youths, scientists, rabbis, and others came together to establish complete and absolute sovereignty over the whole of Israel, along with building settlements in the areas which they considered to be a part of their homeland. Mercaz Harav Yeshiva, headed by Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook had, in fact, ordered its students to “close your [religious] books and set out to gain control over all parts of the Greater Land of Israel, including the territories conquered in 1967.”<sup>20</sup>

The violence that groups such as this engaged in had its roots in the belief system that Jewishness was under threat from the Arabs and the secular Israeli society. They rejected the secular ideals of democracy and the separation of church and the state, or in this case, the separation of the synagogue and the state, perceiving themselves to be the sole guardians of the values of Judaism. The members of Gush Emunim and Jewish Underground firmly believed that in a struggle between

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<sup>18</sup> See Aderet (2017) for Testimonies from the Censored Deir Yassin Massacre.

<sup>19</sup> See Lustick (1985) on his report on Jewish fundamentalism in Israel.

<sup>20</sup> See Gruenpeter (2011) on how the Gush Emunim Settlers Movement was established.

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Zionism and democracy, it would always be the former which would take precedence for which extrajudicial and extralegal action would be justified.<sup>21</sup>

They derived the legitimacy for their actions from the concept of Redemption, which had first been propagated by Yehuda Etzion, a religious right-wing activist and had the support of the rabbinical authorities. Redemption, according to Judaism, would be brought about when the Jews would have proven themselves to be worthy of the good deeds. It also refers to the salvation of the Jews from the situations or states which would destroy the value of human life and existence.<sup>22</sup>

Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook was the founder of Gush Emunim besides being the first chief rabbi of Israel. The yeshiva he founded, Mercaz HaRav, preached the words which possibly sowed the seeds of fundamentalist rhetoric and actions in the country. For example, it talked of how non-Jews living under Jewish law in Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel) must either be enslaved as water carriers and wood hewers, or banished, or exterminated.” Late Rabbi Mordechai Tzemach Eliyahu further added fuel to the fire. He said, “If they don’t stop after we kill 100, then we must kill 1,000. And if they don’t stop after 1,000, then we must kill 10,000. If they still don’t stop we must kill 100,000. Even a million. Whatever it takes to make them stop.”<sup>23</sup>

Peace and compromise are anathemas to Israel and the Jewish identity, as understood by such terrorist groups. Such convictions had culminated into the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 at the hands of Yigal Amir. Two sets of statements, one being when he confessed his crime to the police and the other when he was convicted of first-degree murder in 1996, explain how deeply rooted fundamentalist Zionist ideals are in the minds of individuals associated with groups such as these.

In his statement to the police, he said, “The Arabs are our antithesis in every way. We can't live peacefully with them. For three years Rabin's government have imposed their outlook in a way that's created new concepts. I mean, peace has received a new meaning. The word peace is, to me, first of all, peace within the nation. You must love your own people before you can love others.”<sup>24</sup> As his punishment was read out in the court, Amir had claimed that he had been driven by his

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<sup>21</sup> See Macgillivray (2016) on the Impact of Gush Emunim on the Social and Political Fabric of the Israeli Society.

<sup>22</sup> See Dexter, (2017) on the notion of redemption in the Jewish religion.

<sup>23</sup> See Lendman (2012) on the troubling Israeli Religious Fundamentalism.

<sup>24</sup> See Beauchamp (2015) on Israel’s Jewish terrorism problem.

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religious conviction and the desire to protect ‘his’ people. He had also claimed, “The state of Israel is a monstrosity. Everything I did, I did for God, for the Torah of Israel, the people of Israel and the land of Israel.”<sup>25</sup>

Gush Emunim’s deadliest attack took place in February 1984, when Baruch Goldstein opened fire on the worshippers who had come to offer their prayers in the Ibrahimi Mosque in downtown Hebron, at dawn. At least 29 people were said to have lost their lives, while over 100 were injured, with many of them becoming paralyzed as a result of the brutality that was inflicted on them. The Israeli government had released an official statement that Goldstein was a lone gunman and was mentally disabled. However, those who survived, believe that he had acted with the full support of the Israeli forces and the event was not a result of the outburst of a mentally disabled man. In the aftermath of the massacre, the Israeli government had granted more than half of the area of the mosque, to the Jewish visitors and the settlers.<sup>26</sup>

The Jewish Underground was a vigilante militant organization that was formed in the 1980s and operated by the members of Gush Emunim. It carried out a series of revenge killings against the Palestinians, by booby-trapping the cars of the West Bank mayors and attacking students at the Islamic College in Hebron. While it had even a more devastating plan to destroy the Dome of the Rock, it was rather fortunate that the authorities had stopped such havoc from being wrecked. While Gush Emunim had officially ceased to exist in 1984, its ideals and values continue to have a hold over the Israeli society. The ardent supporters of the settler movement, while only consisting of a minute section of the total population, hold huge sway over the public offices. Parties such as Jewish Home and Likud, both being the supporters of the building of settlements in the occupied territories, have repeatedly found a place in the Knesset. Key infrastructural and educational facilities are also under the control of the Gush Emunim supporters. Its advocates are a part of the religious Zionist units called the Hesder, in the Israeli Defense Force (IDF).<sup>27</sup>

The violent acts that the settler population engages in, are undoubtedly acts of terror. Instead of clarifying them as such, the Netanyahu-led administration in 2014, had blocked the legislation in the Knesset, which would have branded the attacks by the Zionist zealots on Palestinians in the West Bank, as acts of terrorism. These settlers have been responsible for torching mosques,

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<sup>25</sup> See Curtius (1996) on how Rabin ‘s assassin denounced the court as he gets life sentence.

<sup>26</sup> See Wiles (2014) on the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre.

<sup>27</sup> See Macgillivray (2016) on the Impact of Gush Emunim on the Social and Political Fabric of the Israeli Society.

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physically attacking unarmed Palestinians by throwing stones at them and destroying the olive tree groves. Moreover, the members of IDF have also been active participants in pelting stones along with the zealots. According to The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), there has been a 69% increase in Jewish settler attacks against the Palestinians in 2018 as compared to the previous year. 265 Palestinians were targeted in their homes, 7900 trees were destroyed and 540 vehicles were damaged by the settlers.<sup>28</sup>

What we witness in the occupied territories of West Bank and Gaza Strip can be equated with apartheid. The case remained the same before the Oslo Accords were negotiated in 1993, during the negotiation process and has remained a constant variable in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Palestinians live under siege, as prisoners in their own homes.<sup>29</sup>

Rabbi Kahane was an American born rabbi and Israeli nationalist, whose ideas went on to inspire the hilltop youth organization, whose activities have been discussed in this paper. As a teenager, he was an active participant of the Betar, the militant revisionist youth movement.<sup>30</sup> In 1968, he had formed the controversial militant group called Jewish Defense League (JDL) for the self-defense of the Jewish community in Brooklyn, New York. It also advocated and took part in Jewish vigilantism against the representatives and offices of the Soviet Union to protests against the treatment meted out to the Jewish population in the erstwhile USSR. Jewish organizations which were perceived to be moderate, and Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) were not spared either. In 1971, after migrating to Israel, he had formed Kach, a political party that took a firm anti-Arab stance. He had called for the annexation of the territories that were occupied by the Palestinians and to violently expel them.<sup>31</sup>

For him, the claims of Israel being a democratic state stood in direct contradiction with the teachings of the Torah. The only genuine Jewish state in his eyes was the one in which the leadership would be carefully selected on the basis of the knowledge and adherence to Halacha.<sup>32</sup> Rabbi Kahane was one of Israel's foremost alt-right leader till his assassination in 1990.

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<sup>28</sup> See The Times of Israel (2008) on UN's record of the increase in attacks on the Palestinians.

<sup>29</sup> See Shahak (1994) on Jewish Fundamentalism.

<sup>30</sup> See JEWISH VIRTUAL LIBRARY for an understanding of Meir Kahane.

<sup>31</sup> See Sales (2019) on how an extremist rabbi's legacy is again haunting Israeli politics.

<sup>32</sup> "See HAARETZ (2019) on Why Racist Rabbi Meir Kahane Is Roiling Israeli Politics 30 Years After His Death.

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Hilltop Youth is a nationalist, religious, alt-right organization that is involved in the establishment of illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank territory. The members of this organization have a deep-seated hatred against the Palestinians, whom they believe are seeking to hurt the Jewish interests and, therefore, retaliation against them is justified. Arabs, according to them have no claim to the Jewish homeland. If the Arabs venture into the lands occupied by the settlers, they face the danger of being attacked with stones and knives.

These settlers derive the legitimacy of their actions from the teachings of Torah and claim that they carry out the deeds in the name of and with the help of God so that the Messiah will come to them. Torah is the only law which they consider to be authentic. They consider themselves to be God's chosen people and have an expansionist agenda. They constantly seek to expand the settlement areas under their control and are involved in revenge killing against the Arabs for the wrong they believe has been done to them.<sup>33</sup> According to them, in retaliation for the killing of one Jew, the blood of a thousand Arabs must be spilled.

These fundamentalists have taken the law into their own hands because they believe that the state of Israel has done nothing to eliminate the enemies. Their actions are supposed to be the defining factors of what a true Israeli ought to be. They often indulge in what has been termed as the Price-Tag attacks. These are the violent attacks directed against Israeli forces and the Palestinians, to protest against the demolition of the illegal settlements. Each attack is the price that the settlers seek to extract for each of the outposts being torn down.<sup>34</sup>

While there have been several of these attacks in the West Bank, one of the most widely documented attacks was the one that took place in July 2015, in Duma. This was an arson attack in which an 18-month old Ali Dawabsheh and his parents Saad and Riham lost their lives. In the early hours of the morning, on July 31, Molotov cocktails were thrown into their house. The only surviving member of the family was 4-year-old Ahmed, who escaped with burns over 2/3 of his body.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See Al Jazeera (2018) on Israel's Hilltop Youth.

<sup>34</sup> See Schuppe (2015) on What is 'Price Tag.

<sup>35</sup> See Al Jazeera (2018) on Israel's Hilltop Youth.

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In this case of Jewish terrorism, while 28 people were initially arrested, only 1 person, Amiram Ben-Uliel was indicted by the court in January 2016. During one of the court hearings, Ahmed's maternal grandfather had to encounter some of the radicalized youth who first asked where his grandson Ali was and then shouted that he was on the grill. Wedding of Hate was a video that went viral, in which the groom and his guests were celebrating the murder of Ali Dawabsheh. Rabbi Kahane's grandson, Ettinger, was one of the suspects charged with the arson attack in Duma. He was, however, released from the police custody after spending just 10 months in jail for committing such a heinous crime and placed under house arrest.<sup>36</sup>

Ben-Zion Gopstein, the leader of the extremist group Lahava, is a former student of Kahane's. His hatred is not limited to the Palestinian Arabs. It is also directed towards the Christians, whom he refers to as the blood-sucking vampires that should be expelled from the region of Middle East, even advocating for the churches in Israel to be torched to the ground. He believes that there is no place for Christmas in the holy land. Gopstein seems to have later slightly changed his stance as he explained that his statements were only directed towards the Christian missionaries and not all the Christians.<sup>37</sup> In November 2014, Lahava activists had set fire to a Jewish-Arab school in Jerusalem. Derogatory statements such as "End miscegenation" and "there's no co-existing with cancer"<sup>38</sup> were spray-painted on the school walls. They continue to indulge in violent acts against the Arabs and advocate complete segregation of Jews and non-Jews.

Rebuilding Temple Mount and destroying the Al-Aqsa mosque in the process has been understood as an important rallying point for the Jewish fundamentalists since the 1967 war. They believe that the entire surrounding area solely belongs to the Jewish population and their victory over 52 years ago was a divine proclamation. Since then, a strong wave of messianic movement has emerged and continued to grow in intensity. This act by the fundamentalists has served to exacerbate tensions between the opposing parties to the Israel-Palestine conflict. It has often been defined as the powder keg of the entire conflict, for any misstep would yet again pit Israel in a bloody battle against the Arab world and Islamic faith.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See Al Jazeera (2018) on Israel's Hilltop Youth.

<sup>37</sup> See Younes (2015) on the way that the Jewish leader is demanding expulsion of 'Christian Vampires'.

<sup>38</sup> See Ferber (2016) on How Israel Must Fight Violent Jewish Extremists.

<sup>39</sup> See YouTube (2005) In the name of the Temple: The Irresistible Ascension of Jewish Fundamentalism Trailer.

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Their ultimate goal is to instigate enough hatred and anger amongst the Jews which would lead to the complete ethnic cleansing of the non-Jewish population. A large number of them have terrified the Palestinians Arabs living in Jerusalem, into submission. Racist Lynch mobs roam the city center and in one of their attacks, they attacked a 17-year-old Jamal Julani, as a result of which he has been in a coma for 7 years. Another survivor was stabbed in his shoulder and his back. While he has lived to tell the tale, however, the psychological trauma has still not faded. The threat of the non-Jewish population taking over their holy land is said to have pushed these radical elements over the edge.<sup>40</sup>

Jewish fundamentalism as one can understand has a racial component attached to it, i.e., of racial superiority. The fundamentalists place the Arabs (gentiles) at the lowest rung of the food chain, believing themselves to be racially superior. De-humanising the Arab population is a recurring occurrence. Rabbi Yitzhak Ginsburgh has claimed that the life of a Jew has more worth than that of a non-Jew. He was one of the staunch defenders of the massacre carried out by Baruch Goldstein. He, in fact, dismissed the notion of the event constituting murder of innocent civilians for the killing of Palestinians guided by revenge was a Jewish virtue.<sup>41</sup> Rabbi Manis Friedman does not “believe in western morality, i.e. don’t kill civilians or children, don’t destroy holy sites, don’t fight during holiday seasons, don’t bomb cemeteries, don’t shoot until they shoot first because it is immoral. The only way to fight a moral war is the Jewish way: Destroy their holy sites. Kill men, women and children (and cattle).”<sup>42</sup> A parallel can be drawn between such a train of thought and the policies that were once implemented by Nazi Germany.

Otzma Yehudit or the Jewish Power is a far-right political party that was formed by Kahane’s followers. While it has been giving a new name, its ideals and objectives continue to remain the same as that of Kach’s. It continues to justify the acts committed by the Jewish terrorists and preaches violence against the non-Jewish population. It has also called for the deportation of the people it refers to as Arab extremists (the Arab population in Israel which deemed to be disloyal to the state), the imposition of Israeli sovereignty over Temple Mount, the annexation of the territories lying between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordanian River, among others. One of its prominent members is Baruch Marzel, who was once Kahane’s right hand. He has repeatedly given a call for a

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<sup>40</sup> See Cook (2016) on how Israel’s Lehava stirs ‘anarchy’ in Jerusalem.

<sup>41</sup> See Barghouti (2006) on Israel’s Massacre in Qana.

<sup>42</sup> See moment (2013) on Rabbi’s views of how they should treat their Arab neighbors.

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religious war against the homosexual community and spearheads the annual celebrations at Goldstein's grave.<sup>43</sup>

In the upcoming elections, Netanyahu's Likud has invited Otzma Yehudit's members to join hands and compete as coalition partners.<sup>44</sup> With Likud and Otzma Yehudit campaigning together, Jewish fundamentalism is gaining an even more dangerous momentum. According to Yossi Klein Halevi, an Israeli journalist, "Every society has its fringe fanatics. But what Prime Minister Netanyahu has done, because he's desperate, because he's in an increasingly tight political race, is open the door to evil."<sup>45</sup>

### Conclusion

The state of Israel is a product of terrorism and continues to propagate as well as engage in it. There are two different prisms through which the acts of Jewish fundamentalists and those the members of Hamas would be observed: the acts of Jewish fundamentalists, for example, cannot be condemned as terrorist acts because they derived their legitimacy from the teachings of Torah. However, Hamas' indulgence in violence is branded as acts of terrorism because they threaten the existence of the Jewish population and the survival of the state of Israel. The rejection of secular values by the fundamentalist groups is not only a threat to the non-Jewish population but, also to the Jews who are not 'Jewish enough'.

In fact, according to PM Benjamin Netanyahu, there is absolutely no comparison between the acts of the Jewish fundamentalists and those of the Arabs.<sup>46</sup> Fundamentalism, while being mostly attributed to violence, is not always just that. Parties such as Otzma Yehudit propagate the fundamentalist teachings but do not engage in violent acts themselves. Despite what the supposed secularist population of Israel may proclaim, there seems to be widespread support for Jewish Fundamentalism and its ideologue. According to a poll conducted by HAARETZ in 2018, 56% of the total population of Israel, believes itself to be the God's 'chosen people' and a total of 79% people out of this section are alt-right.<sup>47</sup> Thus, they are obligated to not cede the occupied

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<sup>43</sup> See Shihadah (2019) on Netanyahu's new allies being followers of an FBI-designated terrorist.

<sup>44</sup> See HAARETZ (2019) on why Racist Rabbi Meir Kahane Is Roiling Israeli Politics 30 Years After His Death.

<sup>45</sup> See Sales (2019) on how an extremist rabbi's legacy is again haunting Israeli politics.

<sup>46</sup> See Aharish (2015) on Netanyahu's claim that Jewish terrorism holds no comparison to scope of Palestinian terror.

<sup>47</sup> See Levy (2018) on how 79 Percent of Right-wingers Believe Jews Are the Chosen People.

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territories. It has been suggested that beneath the proclamation of such views, a religious war continues to brew.

The views held by this patronizing majority, who believe that they are the chosen ones and the whole of Israel and Palestine is for the Jews and should thus be ethnically cleansed of the 'others', has similarities to the anti-Semitic views that Nazi Germany once held. Holocaust, which was the consequence of such views, is a horror that seems to have been conveniently forgotten, especially by the Israelis, when they perpetrate violence against those who are different from them. This does not imply that the survivors and the later generations have erased from their memories the implications of Hitler's 'final solution'. What it does imply is that the lessons of history are deemed inconsequential, when such an approach is applied towards the non-Jewish population.

The actions of the fundamentalists are paving the way for the implementation of their own 'final solution'. What can be analyzed by studying them is that the survivors of the Holocaust have passed on to their future generations, as a part of their inheritance, anger, resentment, and hatred against the 'others'. In a way, they are genetically predisposed towards violence. The survivors of violence have emerged as the perpetrators of violence against those who are weaker than them. As late Sir Gerald Kaufman had rightly summed up in his speech in the British House of Commons in 2009, the massacre of the Jews during the Holocaust has been used as a justification for the indiscriminate and ruthless killing of the Palestinian Arabs, backed by the Israeli government.<sup>48</sup> They follow the Talmudic teaching of rising up to kill others before they can kill you. It has been used as a justification to carry out pre-emptive strikes against the enemies of the state.

Some of the traditional solutions provided to counter fundamentalism include secularists embracing the religious values in the public sphere, negotiating with such groups to arrive at a compromise, using coercive force and threats of reprisal, or completely surrendering to their demands. However, faults lie with each one of them. In the process of embracing the religious values, there lies the danger that the religious Zionist values might assume a more dominant position across the board and secularism might no longer be able to dictate the terms.

There is no room for negotiating with them because they are blind to the benefits of arriving at an acceptable compromise. The advice of the rabbis contrary to their beliefs falls on deaf ears. There

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<sup>48</sup> See YouTube (2009) on a UK Jewish MP's claim that Israel was born out of Jewish Terrorism.

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neither exists the possibility of completely surrounding to their ideologue and demands because therein lies the danger that it would mark the beginning of another holocaust and may even result in a spillover effect. Use of coercive means or threats may blow up in the faces of those who would instigate it, as religious groups tend to push back with even more force when they feel that their religion is under threat.

The major problem is that Israeli society seems to have arrived at a stalemate about what steps to take to constructively counter this problem. There seem to be only two alternatives as far as the future of Jewish fundamentalism is concerned: either it will reach its apogee and fade away or it will continue to rot the Israeli society from within before it completely tears it apart. This paper does not seek to categorize all Jews as fundamentalists or propagate anti-Semitism. However, what it tries to highlight is the rising threat to the secular values, the Palestinians, and the stability of the region of the Middle East. Perhaps, against all other odds, we would find ourselves on the other side of the tunnel.

As Uri Regev rightly put forth in his message for the people of Israel, “We need equity, tolerance and compassion. Only the deepest soul-searching and bold action will stave off today’s threat of growing erosion from within.”<sup>49</sup>

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### **Note on Contributor**

*Saman Ayesha Kidwai* has completed her MA in Conflict Analysis and Peacebuilding from Jamia Millia Islamia. Current main interests: International affairs, Middle Eastern and Balkan politics, as well as Gender-based issues.

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<sup>49</sup> See Regev (2016) on the importance of destroying Jewish Fundamentalism.

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