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Jewish religious extremism in the face of the peace process and Oslo Accords

Introduction

Radicalism and extremism in the modern world take on a variety of forms, from political to religious, ideological, moral, economic, or environmental. Movements and political and social organisations of all kinds that use aggressive rhetoric to achieve particular aims are not a new phenomenon in the sphere of either national or international security. However, this does not change the fact that they constantly remain a challenge to the security systems of countries around the globe. As regards religious extremism, the greatest interest is aroused by issues relating to Islam. This is linked to the processes, transformations and phenomena of a social, economic and cultural nature that have emerged since the late 1970s, leading to the rebirth and intensification of fundamentalist tendencies within that faith. Relevant events here include the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the war in Afghanistan and the formation of Al-Qaeda, the war fought in Lebanon in 1982–1985, and the first Gulf War (Adamczuk 2011: 199). Interest in Middle Eastern issues and the threats associated with Islamist ideology has led to a situation where the notion of religious fundamentalism is associated almost exclusively with Islam. Manifestations of violence and acts of aggression inspired by other religions are not as frequently recognised. It should be borne in mind that all of the great religions, including Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, and Judaism, have extreme factions that use radical methods to pursue their goals (Izak 2015: 183). These create a real threat to the functioning of states, and pose a challenge to the security system as a whole.

This article will analyse Jewish religious extremism at both individual and collective levels, and will examine the attitudes, behaviours, actions and rhetoric of radical individuals and groups with regard to the peace process and

the Oslo Accords. Analysis will be made of the radical Jewish movements and their leaders, as well as acts of terrorism carried out by individuals. The study's working hypothesis is that actions by Jewish extremists, as both individuals and groups, are directed against the agreements with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and represent an attempt to undermine the peace process. The research questions accompanying the hypothesis will concentrate on two issues: what methods, means of communication and forms of action have been or are used by Jewish radicals, and how their activity has affected or currently affects Israel's sociopolitical situation and internal security. In this context one may also pose a question concerning the evolution of radical Jewish movements. The research approaches used in this study include the behavioural, institutional-legal, and historical methods. Consideration of the hypothesis and of the above questions will be supported by an analysis of the political behaviours of selected groups and individuals and of the terms of the Oslo Accords, and a historical outline of and description of changes in the process of emergence of Jewish extremism over the years.

The Oslo Accords – general provisions and their significance for the peace process

The 1990s should be seen as a watershed and a turning point for relations between Israel and Palestine. This situation was influenced by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the bipolar world, which initiated a change in the architecture of international relations and security. The Palestinian cause, of which the countries of the Eastern bloc had been the greatest advocates, lost its protectors. The beginning of Israeli–Palestinian talks was possible for two reasons. The first was the redefinition and remodelling of the policies of the PLO, the roots of which can be found both in the loss of support from communist countries, and Yasser Arafat's decision to support the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (Szydzisz 2018: 30–31). The latter led to the suspension of aid to the PLO by the Gulf states and to a worsening of the organisation's image in the international arena. The second reason was the coming to power of the Israeli left in 1992. The formation of a government by Yitzhak Rabin and the Labour Party opened a path to negotiations with the PLO. In previous years Israel had not wished to enter into any discussions with that grouping. Thus, the events of the early 1990s should be considered a new chapter in Israeli–Palestinian relations. An opportunity for direct negotiations arose, which gave hope for an improvement in relations between the two sides (Szydzisz 2019: 188).

The start of the peace process and the signing of the Oslo Accords led to the creation of the Palestinian Authority (also known as the Palestinian National Authority)¹ as an administrative structure formally governing the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The most significant Israeli–Palestinian agreements include such documents as the Declaration of Principles signed on 13 September 1993 (known as Oslo I), the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area (Cairo Agreement) of 4 May 1994, and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip of 28 September 1995 (known as Oslo II). For the purpose of analysing the attitude of Jewish extremists to the agreements with the Palestinians, it is valuable to take a closer look at these legal instruments, to define their regulatory frameworks, and to evaluate their practical implementation and *modus vivendi*. The road to the signing of the Israeli–Palestinian accords and the drafting of the aforementioned documents is a very broad topic, but is not the main area of interest of this article. For present purposes, a description will be given only of the most important provisions on the establishment of the Palestinian Authority which may have influenced the behaviours and attitudes of Jewish religious radicals with regard to the peace process.

The signing of the Declaration of Principles was primarily of symbolic significance, since it was the first official agreement between the two sides of the conflict. It had for the most part a more general character, and it only superficially sketched out arrangements in such areas as elections, jurisdiction, and matters of public order in the area governed by the Palestinian Authority. However, taking account of the document's annexes and protocols, it is seen that it addressed in quite a detailed manner matters relating to the creation of the structures of that authority (Jarzabek 2012: 158). A significant element in the context of the status of the new structure was Article V, which referred to a transitional period (supposed to last for five years) and negotiations on its final status. That article stated that such questions as the status of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, Jewish settlements, determination of borders, foreign policy, and security (*de facto* the most important elements of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict) would be reviewed only in the course of negotiations on the final status (Declaration of Principles 1993: Article V). The document provided for the transfer of competences to the Palestinian National Authority in such areas as education, culture, social care, direct taxation, tourism, and health (Declaration of Principles 1993: Article VI). Among other general matters included in that agreement were laws and military orders, economic cooperation between Israel and Palestine, and cooperation with Jordan and Egypt. In spite of the

¹ The two names are used interchangeably in this article.

symbolic value of the first document signed by the parties to the conflict, the Declaration of Principles was very limited in scope. While it may be considered a mark of pragmatism that the most controversial issues were set aside to a later date, the facts that the strategic goal of the peace negotiations was not specified, the political future of the Palestinian Authority as regards its possible transformation into a future state was left undefined, and the general nature of the document allowed much discretion in its interpretation are evidence of its numerous defects. With hindsight it may be concluded that most of the terms of the Declaration of Principles, though constituting a historic agreement, were of more a declarative than a practical nature.

In turn, the Gaza–Jericho Agreement, often overlooked or under-recognised in publications dealing with the peace process, was more visibly relevant to the functioning of the Palestinian National Authority, since it regulated such everyday questions as administrative, legal and financial affairs (Jarżabek 2012: 163). Article V of the document concerned matters of jurisdiction, marking out the powers of the Palestinian National Authority in territorial, personal, and functional terms. The division of competences meant that in judicial matters the Palestinians would have authority in the Gaza Strip and Jericho, and that all residents of those territories would be subject to that authority with the exception of Israelis. However, that authority would not include such matters as public affairs, internal security, and foreign relations (Gaza–Jericho Agreement 1994: Article V). Economic matters were regulated in what was known as the Paris Protocol, signed on 29 April 1994 (Annex IV). The document laid down a customs policy between the two sides, as well as standards for the functioning of the Palestinian economy (*ibidem*: Article XIII). Also of interest were the provisions in Annex III stating that offences committed in Jewish settlements or by Israelis in the territories of the Palestinian Authority would be subject to Israeli jurisdiction. Moreover the document gave Israel the right to arrest “non-Israelis” if they were suspected of committing an offence against the state of Israel or Israelis. The Palestinian National Authority was further obligated to submit reports to Israel concerning crimes committed on their territory (*ibidem*: Annex III Article I). We observe here a marked disproportion in the prerogatives of the Palestinian and Israeli justice systems, given that Israelis were not required to abide by Palestinian law, while Palestinians were subject both *de facto* and *de jure* to Israeli law.

In turn, the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Oslo II), signed on 28 September 1995, concerned above all the administrative division of the West Bank. This is a highly complex issue, because that document was extended by other agreements and separate legal instruments,

which leads to discrepancies in the data found in source materials. One might mention at the very least the separate division of the city of Hebron into zones H1 and H2.² The document's seven annexes covered all of 300 pages, which complicates the task of presenting the most significant points of this agreement. The West Bank was to be divided into three zones: A, B, and C. As to the details of this division, the agreement referred to the accompanying maps and schedules (Interim Agreement 1995: Article XI). These assigned authority and control in the various zones. Zone A, covering 3% of the West Bank, was to be under full Palestinian control; zone B (24% of the territory) was to be administered by the Palestinian National Authority but with the stipulation that Israel would be responsible for security; and zone C, which was the largest in terms of area, was to be fully controlled by the Israeli side. This last zone covered 74% of the West Bank (Kosiorek 2021: 256). The general provisions of the peace accords state that the Palestinian Authority governs the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but in the case of the former area the articles of subsequent agreements significantly complicate the Authority's freedom of action. Oslo II placed 74% of it under *de facto* Israeli control, while in a further 24% the Jewish state enjoyed prerogatives in matters of security. Given that zone C is the area with the greatest development potential, this points to an inequality in the territorial division (ibidem: 256). On 23 October 1998 the Wye River Memorandum was signed – a further agreement relating to the West Bank, under which Israel was to transfer a further 13% of the territory to the Palestinian government (Strużyński 2013: 89). To date, however, only the initial stage of the agreement has been implemented, under which Israel transferred only 2% (Beinin 1999). Other matters regulated in Oslo II included the structure of the Palestinian Authority (referred to consistently in the document as a "Council"), elections to the Palestinian bodies, and the powers of the Palestinian National Authority in relation to, among other things, executive authority (Interim Agreement 1995).

The Oslo Accords should be seen on the one hand as a turning point in relations between Israel and Palestine, in view of the symbolic dimension of the Declaration of Principles, which was the first agreement of that kind between the two sides. On the other hand, numerous limitations were placed on the Palestinian Authority as compared with the Jewish state, in the areas of legislation, administration, security, and justice. It is certainly noteworthy that the agreements did not define the future political shape of the Palestinian National Authority or settle matters relating to the transformation of that

² This division was established by the Hebron Protocol signed on 17 January 1997 by Yasser Arafat and Benjamin Netanyahu.

structure into a state. They also lacked provisions concerning the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Another point of contention is the inequality between Palestinian and Israeli law. These arguments were raised by Yasser Arafat's opponents, who noted the absence of any reference to the formation of an independent Palestinian entity, which might have seemed to be the PLO's main goal. The setting aside of the most critical matters may be regarded as a mark of pragmatism, but given that agreements have still not been worked out with regard to matters of Jewish settlement, the status of Jerusalem, or Palestinian refugees, this depreciates the significance of the peace process. There were also voices of criticism in Israeli circles. It was feared that the Israeli–Palestinian agreements and the whole of the peace process would lead to the creation of an Arab state on land which – according to advocates of a Greater Israel, for example – belonged to *Eretz Israel* (the Land of Israel). Although the documents establishing the Palestinian National Authority had numerous defects, for extremist circles the symbolic and ideological overtones of the agreement were of greater significance. Opposition to the peace process comes in particular from the groups and individuals promoting Jewish settlement and referring to the religious and Messianic concepts of Zionism. These include extremist fractions that use violence and other radical methods to propagate their views. We shall attempt to examine the origins and roots of selected political groupings. This, in the light of the documents described above, will help to analyse the attitude of Jewish religious extremists to the peace agreements reached with the Palestinians.

Roots and origin of Jewish religious extremism

In the state of Israel there currently exist two radical social groups whose views are based on religious factors. These are the ultra-Orthodox Jews (*haredim*), who desire to organise the public and national space on the principles of *halakha* (Jewish law), and the religious Zionists, who link the idea of Zionism with Judaism and view the Land of Israel in Messianic categories (Szydzisz 2012a: 210–214). It should be noted that in both cases the groupings and their ideologies are not uniform, and they interpret religious questions differently depending on their individual aspirations. The ultra-Orthodox Jews are a community with internal differences also in political matters, while among religious Zionists not all circles are radical. The present study will analyse the second group, out of which emerged the elements that today challenge the Israeli–Palestinian agreements. The roots of the fundamentalist Jewish groups founded

on the idea of religious Zionism go back to the late 1960s, and are linked to the activities of two radical organisations: the Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) movement and the Kach party. Their chief declared goals were based on representing the interests of Jewish settlers and promoting the colonisation of Palestine in the light of the Greater Israel concept. Both used aggressive rhetoric and initiated various kinds of actions with the use of violence and terror. It should be noted, however, that the Kach party was more confrontational in nature, and racism and rhetoric based on arguments of force served as a foundation for its ideology. In the case of Gush Emunim, acts of terror, probably inspired by a small number of radicals, were organised at grass-roots level. For the purposes of this article, it appears desirable to discuss the activities of these groups, because their worldview had a significant influence on the thinking and motivation of present-day radical Jewish movements and individuals.

The Gush Emunim movement was established formally in 1974, but its existence dates back to the Six-Day War, in which Israel annexed the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank including East Jerusalem. In view of its psychological and political consequences, this conflict was an event of special importance for Israeli society. The state of Israel now administered a territory four times larger than prior to the war, making it in some sense a regional power (Shapira 2012: 307). Another consequence was economic growth and improved living standards for Israelis (*ibidem*: 321). The organisation's unquestioned leader and personal authority was rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, who had made an impassioned speech three weeks before the June war. In his sermon the rabbi lamented the division of Palestine that had been made pursuant to UN Resolution 181 of 29 November 1947. In his view, the Land of Israel, being God's Kingdom, was not something that could be given up. Israel's annexing of territories as a result of the war of 1967 began to be interpreted as an instance of divine intervention that was to lead to the recovery of the lands to which the chosen nation was entitled (Krawczyk 2007: 111). In the light of the subsequent changes to Israel's political map, rabbi Kook's inflammatory speech was taken by his supporters as prophetic. Zvi Yehuda was expanding on the ideas of his father, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Abraham Isaac Kook (Cohn-Sherbok, El-Alami 2002: 14), who emphasised the unity between the Land of Israel, the Nation of Israel, and the Torah. Key to his thinking was an unbreakable bond between the Jews, the lands where they lived in Biblical times (including Judea and Samaria), and the principles of Judaism (Szydzisz 2012b: 169). The fervour of Zvi Yehuda Kook and his supporters was not quelled by the next conflict with the Arab states – the Yom Kippur War. Indeed, it confirmed the confidence of Gush Emunim's

leader in the righteousness of his views. The Israeli victory, bought with heavy losses, was presented by the organisation as a failure to use an opportunity given by God, for which activists blamed the secular Zionists. They believed that the state should be run on the basis of religious principles and its own identity in the light of the doctrine of Zionist redemption. According to Gush Emunim's rhetoric, the war and the losses incurred therein were a punishment and warning from God, resulting from the poor use of the lands acquired in the Six-Day War. Redemption could be obtained only by settling Jews in the new territories. This gave the movement mass appeal, and it came to include both religious and secular Jews. It expanded its social base with the aim of increasing Jewish presence on the lands annexed in the war of 1967. Many attempts were also made to establish illegal colonies in the West Bank (Bolechów 2007: 89). The organisation never became an official political party, and did not have its own coherent programme. Its main demands were set out in the manifesto that brought the Bloc of the Faithful into existence. This indicates that the "great awakening of the Jewish nation which will fully bring to life the Zionist vision, conscious that this vision comes from the Jewish heritage of Israel and that the fulfilment of that task is equivalent to the redemption of Israel, and with it the whole world" (Gierycz 2014: 486) concerns five areas: the propagation of knowledge and education (the bond linking the Land of Israel, the Nation of Israel, and the Torah, Jewish ethics, Zionist consciousness and the national mission); love of Israel; *Aliyah* (immigration to Palestine); settlement in the Land of Israel; and a resolute foreign and security policy (Szydzisz 2012c: 277–278). Settlement was a key element of the document, as members of the movement saw it as an element of the divine plan of deliverance (Gierycz 2014: 286). The colonisation of Palestine was expected to lead to the realisation of the conception of a Greater Israel, much desired by the organisation's activists (Feige 2011: 181).

Gush Emunim opposed the signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, which took place on 26 March 1979. Under this agreement, Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egyptian control, in return for a normalisation of diplomatic relations (Lipa 2018: 313). This entailed the removal of Jewish settlers from that area, which might be considered a political failure on the Bloc's part. There was a decline in the organisation's activity, and in the following years its presence and influence waned significantly, causing it to change the nature of its actions. In 1980 the Gush Emunim Underground was set up, and this quickly transformed into a terrorist organisation (Spinzak 1986: 14). The most notorious acts of aggression that it committed included car bomb attacks on the Palestinian mayors of Ramallah and Nablus, Karim Khalaf and Bassam

Shakaa, in which the former lost a leg and the latter both feet. A bomb planted in the car of the mayor of Al-Bireh, Ibrahim Tawil, was detonated by an Israeli sapper who lost his sight as a result of the explosion (Krawczyk 2007: 167). An attack with tragic consequences carried out by activists of the Bloc of the Faithful took place in Hebron on 26 June 1983. On that occasion the terrorists struck an Islamic university, killing three people and wounding 33. A year later the same group planned a similar attack on the university in Bir Zeit, which they were forced to postpone due to a decision to close the university. It was replaced with a plan to blow up five Arab buses along with their passengers. Detailed plans for the attack were drawn up, but it was foiled by Israeli services (Spinzak 1986: 14). The group also planned to destroy the Dome of the Rock on Temple Mount in Jerusalem, which was meant to provoke a global nuclear conflict and, according to the extremists, bring on the coming of the Messiah. The terrorists spent two years preparing for the attack, making a careful reconnaissance of the location. Once again, the attack was never carried out, this time due to internal divisions within the organisation (Bolechów 2007: 100–102).

The Gush Emunim movement provides a context in which one can observe the evolution of religious Zionism. It is an example of a group whose idealistic dream linked to the settlement of Palestine and the Greater Israel concept became transformed into armed actions of a terrorist nature. This was connected to the weakening of the organisation's influence, which pushed its most radical members to set up an underground wing. The heirs to the political ideas of Gush Emunim in Israel today are to be found in the Yesha Council, formed in 1979 and being the institutional successor to the Bloc of the Faithful (Szydzisz 2012b: 169). Its purpose is to safeguard the interests of Jewish settlers, among other things by developing infrastructure and securing the borders of the state of Israel. Another of its goals is to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state between the Jordan and the Mediterranean (myesha.org.il). Another institution linked to the activities of Gush Emunim is Amana, which also represents Jewish settlers (Szydzisz 2012b: 169).

The second extremist organisation representing religious Zionism is the Kach party. As in the case of Gush Emunim, the activities of this group were based on the role of a personal authority. This was rabbi Meir David Kahane, who was born in 1932 into an Orthodox Jewish family in Brooklyn, New York. In 1968 he founded the Jewish Defense League, whose main declared aim was to protect the Jewish population against acts of intolerance. The rhetoric of Kahane himself and of his group reflected the "besieged fortress syndrome". The rabbi claimed that the whole world was hostile to the Jewish nation (Kraw-

czyk 2007: 142–143). In the name of protecting Jews, the League initially came out in opposition to African American movements: Black Panther and Black Power. In 1969–1972 it carried out terrorist attacks on Soviet institutions and diplomats. The reasons for these attacks were said to be the deterioration of US–Soviet relations and a desire to draw attention to the situation of Jews in the USSR (ibidem: 143). The enemy was defined on ideological grounds: the African American organisations that used the “black power” slogan had adopted the Marxist-Leninist concept of revolutionary struggle against capitalism and imperialism (Wojnowski 2020: 127).

Meir Kahane came to Israel in 1971. His emigration was dictated by the multiple criminal cases being pursued against him in the United States. The Jewish Defense League’s acts of aggression did not diminish after his departure, and in 1975 and 1976 the organisation carried out a series of operations in New York, in which the targets included the Polish consulate, Iraq’s UN delegation, and the American Communist Party (Krawczyk 2007: 144). After Kahane settled in Palestine, he founded a new organisation, Kach. This group was of a more radical nature than Gush Emunim, and in its convictions it went further than the leaders and supporters of the latter organisation. Its ideology was of a highly racist, extremist, and terrorist nature. In contrast to rabbi Kook and the mass political movement that he had founded, Kahane proposed radical methods with respect to the Arab populace, which he referred to as “dogs”, along with other no less offensive invectives. He claimed that the Arabs ought to be expelled from Israel, and this was to be done by force. Another solution that he put forward was the physical elimination of the Arab people (ibidem: 145). The Land of Israel could thus be “cleansed” of unwanted tenants by means of expulsions or even more aggressive and confrontational forms of action. His odium was not directed solely against Arabs. In professing the supremacy of the Jewish nation, Kahane also discriminated against North African Jews who lived in Dimona (a Jewish settlement about 35 km from Beer Sheva). Developing the chauvinistic and religious version of the “chosen people” idea, he also spoke with disdain of Christians and other nationalities. In his view, the enemy was the entire non-Jewish world. As in the case of Gush Emunim, the motivation of the Kach party was the ideology of the Messianic Zionism of redemption. Kahane also referred in speeches to the Six-Day War, identifying it with the liberation of Israel. He blamed the Israeli government for failing to perform what he regarded as the obligation to expel the Arab population from *Eretz Israel* (Bolechów 2007: 102). He wrote: “When Israel liberated its lands in 1967, the reasonable thing that ought to have been done was to expel these vermin from there. However, we are not

normal. We are not reasonable. We have allowed all of them to remain – the murderous Ishmaelites, who are not able to live with the Jews or with each other” (ibidem: 102–103). According to Ehud Spinzak, Kahane’s ideology can be placed somewhere between those represented by Gush Emunim and the *haredim*. On the one hand, when he lived in the ultra-Orthodox community in the United States, he shared its aversion to the secular Israeli establishment on the grounds of its “sinful and non-Jewish character” (Spinzak 1998: 119). On the other hand, like the Gush Emunim movement, he deified the Six-Day War and its consequences in the process of building the State of Israel (ibidem: 119). Rabbi Kahane was an opponent of democracy, claiming that such a political system was unacceptable in Israel, as he considered it contradictory to the idea of Zionism (Krawczyk 2007: 149). The leader of Kach also rejected the document constituting the Jewish state – the 1948 Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel – which promised to foster “the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants” as well as “complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex” (Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel 1948). Clauses of this type were unacceptable to the leader of Kach.

To emphasise his defiance of the state and the Israeli political decision-makers, whom he referred to in his speeches as, among other things, “pathological, sick lefties”, the rabbi established an armed wing of his party, called the TNT (*Terror Neged Terror*, ‘Terror Against Terror’). This group carried out bloody attacks in the West Bank against the Arab population, Christian missionaries, and Jews holding different views (Bolechów 2007: 103). It is estimated that in 1980–1984 TNT carried out more than 380 armed attacks, in which 23 Palestinians died, around 200 were injured, and some 40 were abducted (Szydzisz 2012a: 221). Kach’s armed wing continued its terrorist operations in subsequent years, and there was no change in its situation or tactics following Kahane’s death.³ In 1993 the organisation admitted responsibility for attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank (Bolechów 2007: 103). Kach was a major threat to Israel’s internal security, since on the one hand, it inspired terrorist acts, while on the other, it provoked revenge attacks by Arabs. Rabbi Kahane and his group brought about a change in the state’s perception of security, which had hitherto been largely focused on external threats from hostile Arab coun-

³ Meir David Kahane was shot and killed in New York in 1990. This led to a split in the group, with one fraction, based in Tapuach, being led by his son Benjamin Kahane, who founded the organisation *Kahane Chai* (Kahane Lives). In the year 2000 Benjamin Kahane was himself assassinated (Bolechów 2007: 103; Krawczyk 2007: 155).

tries (ibidem: 103–104). By propagating extremism, radicalism and racism on the basis of a cult of force, the Kach party caused a remodelling of the list of dangers to the state of Israel away from the external and towards the internal dimension, and threatened to trigger a spiral of violence within the country.

Analysis of the two aforementioned groups, Gush Emunim and Kach, leads to some interesting conclusions. One may point out the links between these radical organisations that grew out of religious Zionism. The examples given of terrorist acts planned by the Gush Emunim Underground are attributed by some sources to supporters of Meir Kahane (Szydzisz 2012a: 222). An example of the closeness and convergence of their viewpoints, apart from matters of ideology, goals, and use of the argument of force, was the apparently insignificant fact of the choice of the settlement serving as the Kach party's base. This was Kiryat Arba, situated a short distance from Hebron, and founded with the assistance of supporters of the Bloc of the Faithful and one of that organisation's influential leaders, Moshe Levinger. It was established in 1970 through the use of *fait accompli* tactics and the exertion of effective pressure on the Israeli government. Hebron is of great significance to the Jews, being a holy city of Judaism (Waxman 2019: 173). Still today, the settlement's residents are seen to adhere to the idea of religious Zionism even in its radical forms, as will be described in the following sections. The groups also have successor organisations in present-day Israel, as has been mentioned in relation to Gush Emunim. The Kach party, which was the first group to come out in opposition to the peace process, is also a foundation for radical Jewish movements in Israel today. With regard to the interpenetration of those groups in the past, the Bloc of the Faithful also provides an ideological foundation for today's Jewish extremists who oppose the Oslo Accords.

Hilltop Youth and *Zo Artzeinu*: civil disobedience movements

Israel's political scene is a diverse, multi-party, sociocultural mosaic. Some parties claim in their programmes to represent parts of society both in the social and religious dimensions and in terms of identity. An example is the Shas party, which represents the interests of ultra-Orthodox Sephardic Jews. In turn, the constituency of the group called United Torah Judaism consists of ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazim (Szydzisz 2012b: 175). Although not all ethnic or religious groups have specific political representations, the formula shows how diverse a country contemporary Israel is. It may be concluded that the party system of the Jewish state is one in which individual groups shape their

programmes according to not only social, but also geographical, religious and ethnic determinants. This is particularly interesting in Israel's case, given that within each of the spheres mentioned we can observe much diversity and divergence. The Gush Emunim movement and the Kach party grew out of a divergent environment referring to the concept of a Greater Israel. The ideology based on religious Zionism, which linked redemption to the rhetoric of the colonisation of Palestine and the need to secure the interests of Jewish settlers, was not a new current within Israel. The publicity that the groups attracted was related to the current political situation in the country. The re-emergence of organisations with religious-nationalist foundations took place as a result of the Six-Day War of 1967. This was followed by the Yom Kippur War six years later. The two conflicts served as a political instrument that made it possible to build a social base and tools for spreading the groups' ideology and propagating their demands. It should be noted that these organisations also took actions in violation of Israeli and international law, namely the founding of unauthorised settlements, and that this did not meet with any significant sanctions from the Israeli authorities (Galchinsky 2004: 117–118).

In the context of unauthorised Jewish settlement, which remains a constant obstacle both to the peace process and to Israeli–Palestinian relations, one may pose a question about the function of the law and by the same token the condition of the state of Israel in this sphere. The problem concerning outposts established in violation of both internal and international law gives rise to many controversies. Pro-settlement groups and institutions sometimes give the impression of being above the law. In 2017 the Knesset passed a law regulating settlement in Judea and Samaria which *de facto* allows the retroactive legalisation of the status of Palestinian land on which Jewish settlements have been built. In present-day Israel, therefore, there are situations where Palestinians can suffer confiscation of their property, for compensation, based on laws that apply retroactively (Law on Settlement in Judea and Samaria 2017). Numerous cases of neglect and failure to respect the rights of non-Jewish members of society have emboldened Jewish extremists to resort to violence and terrorism. Thus, the goals espoused by Kach radicals and Gush Emunim fundamentalists have not been forgotten. Other radical Jewish movements reflecting the views of Zvi Yehuda Kook and Meir Kahane have appeared on the Israeli sociopolitical scene, such as Hilltop Youth (*No'ar HaGva'ot*) and *Zo Artzeinu*. The latter movement developed a political structure attempting to gain a place on the Israeli political stage, which is evidence of the support that part of Israeli society gives to the concept of religious Zionism based on the Greater Israel idea. The ideology of both movements is a reflection of the demands of Gush Emunim

and Kach, and their activity involves acts of vandalism and aggression directed against the peace process, Arabs (including Arab Christians), left-wing Jews, Palestinians, and even the Israeli security forces.

Hilltop Youth is a group consisting mainly of young Jews opposing state policy in both institutional and regulatory dimensions, and taking action against the peace process. It is not clear exactly when the organisation was established. It is a group of loosely affiliated extremists using violent methods and concentrating on the propagation of Jewish settlement. In some sources the origins of the youth opposition group are dated to 1998, when then foreign minister Ariel Sharon told young settlers that they should “grab the hilltops”. The comments were a protest against the Wye River agreements that had been forged that same year (Kershner 2005: 184). The new generation of Jewish religious extremism, linking the idea of Zionism with Judaism and the Land of Israel, is not a cohesive political party with a strict hierarchy and established leadership. It is a dispersed organisation, whose members form multiple groups within a single movement. Created from below, drawing on the legacy of Meir Kahane, it is not oriented solely towards political or social activity (Pokrzywiński 2015: 92). Hilltop Youth is known for numerous acts of violence inspired by rebellion against the system. In spite of the lack of a political leader of the sort that Zvi Yehuda Kook was for Gush Emunim, its political leadership is centred on rabbis from nationalist-religious circles and persons engaged in the Jewish settlement process. One of these is Abraham Ran, whose actions motivated young Jewish radicals to promote the aim of colonisation. They began to establish settlement networks close to Palestinian villages in order to implement an organisation of the state on their own principles, that is, based on Jewish tradition and religious considerations (*ibidem*: 92). A change in the focus of activity towards offensive actions directed against the Israeli authorities and uniformed services could be observed in 2005, in relation to the decision by Ariel Sharon – now prime minister – to withdraw settlers from the Gaza Strip. In the light of that decision, radicals linked to Hilltop Youth accused the Israeli government of betraying the nation, which strengthened their inclination towards civil disobedience. This manifests in aggression and hostility towards state institutions, including the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) (*ibidem*: 92–96). One of the movement’s most recognisable members is Meir Ettinger, the grandson of Meir David Kahane, known for his hatred of the secular conception of the state of Israel and his desire to expel the Arabs from the country in order to recreate the biblical Israel. In view of his numerous ideological and political similarities to his grandfather, he is referred to as the “ghost of Meir Kahane” (Juergensmeyer 2017: 51). Aggressive rhetoric and incitement to aggression have landed

Meir Ettinger in court. He was detained in July 2014 in connection with the murder of a Palestinian family in the village of Duma. According to Shin Bet (Israel's internal intelligence service) he was also planning to incite a revolt with the aim of overthrowing the secular state of Israel. This plan was divided into four stages: public relations, recruitment of activists, outbreak of the revolt, and a phase of disturbances. At present, Meir Ettinger's activity in the sociopolitical space poses a threat to the internal security of the Jewish state. Numerous restrictions have been imposed on him; for example, he is banned from entering the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and from having contact with more than 90 persons, and he is subject to a curfew (Levinson 2016).

The *Zo Artzeinu* movement is a more numerous and socially diverse group than Hilltop Youth. It was founded in 1993 by Israeli activist Moshe Feiglin and his acquaintance Shmuel Sackett (Pokrzywiński 2015: 98). The group was set up as a response to the Oslo Accords, which in Feiglin's eyes brought not only ideological consequences. The organisation's founder interpreted the peace agreements in terms of the security of the state. According to his rhetoric, they were a threat to Israel's stability. However, this did not prevent him from also arguing his case on an ideological and religious basis. Feiglin said: "After Oslo I became aware that the right wing was doing something bad, and the only way to repair that state of affairs was to introduce someone loyal to Likud, someone loyal to Judaism and the Land of Israel" (Presler 2008). This statement is a clear indication of views that reflect religious Zionism. It should be remarked that Feiglin made quite effective and well-judged use of the sociopolitical conditions. Mentions of matters relating to the security of the state and citizens of Israel had the potential to win over Israelis to a significant degree, in view of the recently ended First Intifada, which had reduced the trust felt towards the Arab part of society. Moshe Feiglin claimed that the actions of the Israeli authorities in signing the Oslo Accords would mean that Israel would not survive another 50 years (ibidem). The group's leader also emphasised that the nation was sovereign and that the state ought to serve its citizens, not the converse. The organisation thus expressed objections to the actions of the Israeli government and disagreement with its decisions. The group's structure is similar to that of Hilltop Youth, which was also dispersed and networked, but above all anonymous. This meant that members who criticised political decision-makers and the Arab population felt a sense of impunity and unaccountability (Pokrzywiński 2015: 98).

Although *Zo Artzeinu* represents circles that stand against democracy in the state, basing their actions on civil disobedience with respect to the state's structures, institutions, and armed forces, it has a less radical character than

Hilltop Youth. While the latter's members and leaders are accused of murders of Palestinians, the actions of *Zo Artzeinu* have consisted of blockades of state infrastructure (roads and buildings), confrontations with uniformed services, and protests against the governments of prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. One demonstration was attended by 100,000 citizens, leading to the blocking of roads and in effect the paralysis of the transport system (ibidem: 99). Moshe Feiglin decided to expand and formalise his existing political activity. The *Zo Artzeinu* movement evolved into *Manhigut Yehudit* – a group that joined with Likud in the year 2000. Feiglin won a seat in the nineteenth Knesset (knesset.gov.il). Ultimately, however, he lost his influence within the Israeli right wing, and together with his supporters announced plans to create a new party called *Zehut – Tnua Yehudit Yisraelit* (Identity – Israeli Jewish Movement) (Kornbluh 2015). It may be asked whether the emergence on the Israeli political stage of structures based on opposition to the authorities' actions, civil disobedience and activities aimed at damaging the state reflects well on the country's political system. Moshe Feiglin, someone who has his ideological roots in circles with a religious Zionist foundation, and who opposes the Oslo Accords, was able – by entering the Israeli parliament in 2013 – to elevate his demands to the level of the state itself.

Both organisations, in view of their rhetoric, methods and means, are perceived as extremist. Despite the different levels of aggression in their actions, they have been equally effective in hampering the peace process. In 2011–2014 the media reported on acts of vandalism aimed against left-wing Jews, Arab Christians and the Israeli security forces, where the methods, means and choice of targets pointed to the involvement of members of Hilltop Youth. In 2011 graffiti reading “death to traitors” was painted on the door of the house of an Israeli activist (Rozenberg 2011). In October 2012 the radicals targeted a Franciscan monastery in Jerusalem, writing slogans in Hebrew insulting Jesus Christ at the entrance to the site. Two months later more inscriptions insulting Christians were discovered, this time at an Armenian cemetery. A further act of aggression took place in May 2013, again in Jerusalem, against the Abbey of the Dormition, and a month later a Christian cemetery in Tel Aviv was attacked in a similar manner. In July of the same year, an abbey being one of the most valuable historical monastic sites in the Holy Land was profaned. In the following month the Salesian convent in Beit Jimal was attacked with a Molotov cocktail, and graffiti with the words “death to gentiles and revenge” was left (Izak 2015: 206–207). In April 2014 in Galilee the car tyres of an Arab resident of the village of Muawiya were slashed and the star of David painted on the vehicle (Yaakov 2014). The writing of aggressive slogans and graffiti in

Muslim and Christians sites of worship and other places is known as the Price Tag Policy, in reference to the compensation and price that are to be paid by the Palestinians, the Israeli authorities, state institutions and security services for the actions taken to limit unauthorised Jewish settlement (Guiora 2014: 107). The extremists, in making their demands and developing and propagating settlement in violation of Israeli and international law, commit acts of vandalism and violence aimed against other circles with differing political views or religious orientation. This leads to uncontrolled offensive actions that have far-reaching social and political consequences.

The impact of Israeli extremist attacks on the peace process

The 1990s brought a breakthrough in Israeli–Palestinian relations, the peace process created an opportunity to conduct direct negotiations, and the creation of the Palestinian Authority – in a still somewhat incomplete and uncertain form – was a signal that Israel was now willing to talk to the Palestinians after many years. However, between the signings of the Oslo agreements other events took place that not only weakened, but also effectively held back the peace process. These were the Cave of the Patriarchs massacre in Hebron, and the assassination of prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. Certain similarities and differences may be discerned between these incidents. Organisations propagating civil disobedience and opposing the Oslo Accords created an atmosphere of distrust within the country towards the Israeli government, Rabin in particular, and encouraged the most radical elements to resort to extremist actions in the form of individual terrorism. Those extremists emerged from religious Zionist circles or were sympathisers or members of the groups already described. Also not without importance was the evolution of the circles that propagated Jewish settlement, which took their version of religious Zionism encompassing Judaism, the Land of Israel, the Jewish nation and the Torah, and reshaped it over time into a rhetoric that permitted the use of violence. This resulted in an intensification of antagonism and hatred between Jews and Arabs.

On 25 February 1994 a Jew of American origin and Kach party member, Baruch Goldstein, opened fire on Palestinians at prayer in the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron (Freishtat 2010). The attack cost the lives of 29 Palestinians and two Israelis, and left dozens of people wounded (Krawczyk 2007: 176; Szydzisz 2012b: 169–170). The terrorist himself was killed by a desperate and angry crowd. He had apparently said previously that the Arabs were a “disease” (Krawczyk 2007: 176). The act of terror was inspired by the person of Meir

Kahane, who had been a model and mentor for the perpetrator. Goldstein had had connections with Kahane's political beliefs from the beginning, joining the Jewish Defense League while still resident in Brooklyn (ibidem: 176). His hatred of the Arab population went so far that as a military doctor he refused medical assistance to Druze Arabs who served in the Israeli army, stating that he had no intention of helping any non-Jews. An attempt was made to remove him from the army as a result of this stance, but it was unsuccessful, since Goldstein had influential supporters in the military (Bolechów 2007: 104–105). The response of religious-nationalist groups to the massacre was disturbing, and served as a signal to the Israeli authorities to take steps to improve the country's internal security and create mechanisms to protect against terrorist attacks carried out by Jews. As a result of the bloody attack, the authorities decided to outlaw the Kahane and Kahane Chai organisations (Krawczyk 2007: 155–156). The attacker posthumously became a hero to extreme fundamentalist groups, and posters glorifying his actions appeared on the streets. His funeral in Jerusalem attracted more than a thousand radicals, who shouted slogans such as "death to the Arabs" (ibidem: 176). Praise for the act of aggression that led to intensification of the spiral of violence in the country also came from rabbis. Citing religious arguments, they manifested anti-Arab slogans (ibidem: 176). Baruch Goldstein was buried in the Kiryat Arba settlement where he had lived.

This, the political centre of the Kach party, a settlement established with the use of *fait accompli* tactics by Moshe Levinger and Gush Emunim sympathisers, was an ideal place for spreading fundamentalist propaganda. Goldstein's grave became a pilgrimage site and a sanctuary for Jewish extremists. Numerous concerts and events were held to honour the terrorist's memory, and settlers' children wore badges with the slogan "Dr Goldstein has cured Israel's disease" (Bolechów 2007: 104–105). Even today in Kiryat Arba one may observe an attachment to the radical representatives of religious Zionism. One of the settlement's landmarks is Kahane Park, which retains that name despite the outlawing of the party. Another key site is Baruch Goldstein's grave, but no longer in the form of a place of worship: in 1999 Israel's Supreme Court ordered the army to remove the shrine that bore an epitaph praising the terrorist act (ibidem: 104–105). On multiple occasions it has been the site of acts of violence and clashes between Israeli activists and Jewish settlers. In June 2008 settlers prevented activists from the Breaking Silence group from visiting Kiryat Arba, despite the fact that the visit had been approved by the Israeli police (Weiss 2008).

In consequence of the escalation of violence and the support and praise for the Cave of the Patriarchs massacre expressed by Jewish settler groups representing religious Zionism, another unprecedented terrorist act took place –

the assassination of prime minister Yitzhak Rabin on 4 November 1995. This individual attack was the work of another ultra-right nationalist, who was an admirer of Baruch Goldstein and his actions. Yigal Amir justified his act on religious grounds, claiming that God himself had ordered him to murder the prime minister. This was the result of the activities of radical Jewish movements, which had initiated a series of uncontrolled offensive actions having far-reaching social and political consequences. Ideological fuel for the attack, besides Goldstein's inspiration, may have come from the demands of *Zo Artzeinu*, which also expressed objection to Rabin's decisions and opposed the Oslo Accords. As the assassin had expected and intended, the crime paralysed and significantly slowed down the peace process (Czapiewski 2014: 125). In Amir's eyes, Rabin had sacrificed the survival of the Jewish state and nation in the name of concessions to the Palestinians (Bolechów 2007: 105-106). This was in accordance with the rhetoric of *Zo Artzeinu*, which also perceived the agreement with the PLO in terms of the national interest, while also referring to religious factors. Rabin's assassination was the culmination of the actions taken by Jewish religious extremists against the peace process begun in Oslo. It led to the suspension, slowing down and paralysis of that process (Rabkin 2007: 163). Yigal Amir had achieved his goal. Nevertheless, the murder of the Israeli prime minister is not an isolated case of offensive actions directed against the agreement with the PLO. We should also recall the activities of radical Jewish groups like Hilltop Youth and *Zo Artzeinu*, their ideological and political roots, their impact on sociopolitical life, and the fact that these are not the only radical religious groups active in the state of Israel, now or in the past.

Conclusion

While this article has sought to analyse Jewish extremism in the face of the Oslo Accords, it has not exhausted the topic of radical Jewish groupings. Jewish radicalism and religious extremism grew in the lap of religious Zionism, based on the Greater Israel concept and propagating illegal Jewish settlement. They are not a new element of the Israeli sociopolitical mosaic. Undoubtedly, as the examples cited here have shown, radical Jewish movements have been and still are a significant challenge for the country's internal security. Hilltop Youth and *Zo Artzeinu*, which grew out of Gush Emunim and Kach, are the new generation of Jewish religious extremism. Through the activities of these groups, the combination of Zionism with religious factors has evolved into acts of a terrorist nature, as may be seen in the case of all of the groups described here – with

the exception of *Zo Artzeinu*, although this should not trivialise that group's impact on the escalation of violence and internal destabilisation. Its activities, based on civil disobedience and aggressive rhetoric against prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, may have encouraged Yigal Amir to commit his crime, and certainly helped find justification for it on both religious and political grounds.

It remains problematic that a place has been found for this type of viewpoint in the Israeli parliament. It should be asked whether this is desirable for the country's national security. Doubts are also raised by the slowing of the peace process, which indicates that following the changes of government in the wake of Rabin's assassination, the Israeli authorities to some extent succumbed to the extremists' pressure. This is manifested in, among other things, the lack of prospects or desire for further dialogue on the most critical issues in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The final status of the Palestinian National Authority has still not been negotiated.

All of the organisations discussed here have mutual links. The most distinct bond is their ideology, which opposes any compromises with the Arabs, and thus rejects the existence of a Palestinian Authority in any form. This being the case, it is necessary to confirm the hypothesis that the actions of Jewish extremists at both individual and group level are directed against the agreements with the PLO, and represent an attempt to undermine the peace process. It should also be acknowledged that these actions achieve the intended effect. Jewish extremists use or have used for this purpose various methods, forms of action, and means of communication. They demand the development of unauthorised Jewish settlement, not shying from aggressive rhetoric and acts of terror aimed at Arab Christians, Jews with other viewpoints, the Israeli security forces, or even the highest state officials. Radical Jewish movements pose an enormous threat to Israel's security, state structures, institutions, and members of society. They destabilise the internal situation and provoke social unrest. They represent a challenge to the country's internal security system, as the rhetoric used by the groups described here may incite the most extreme elements to acts of aggression similar to the Cave of the Patriarchs massacre in Hebron or the assassination of prime minister Yitzhak Rabin.

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Keywords: Jewish radicalism, religious extremism, religious Zionism, Jewish settlements, Israeli–Palestinian conflict, terrorism

ABSTRACT

This article analyses Jewish religious extremism in both individual and collective forms, and examines the attitudes, actions and rhetoric of radical individuals and groups in relation to the peace process and the Oslo Accords made with the Palestinians. The research problem concerns the impact of the

activity of radical Jewish groups on the sociopolitical situation in Israel and the internal security of the country. The main hypothesis is that the actions of Jewish extremists, as both individuals and groups, are directed against the agreements with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and are an attempt to undermine the peace process. The related research questions focus on two issues: the methods and forms of action used now and in the past by Jewish radicals, and the consequences of their actions. In this context, the evolution of radical Jewish movements is also examined. The research is conducted using behavioural, institutional-legal, and historical methods, and confirms that Jewish extremist activity is not only a serious threat, but also a challenge to Israel's national security.

