

## JDL Unleashes Campaign of Violence on America

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- Donald Neff

### About Donald Neff

Donald Neff has been a journalist for forty years. He spent 16 years in service for *Time Magazine*, as bureau chief in Israel and New York, wrote for the *Los Angeles Times*, and has been a regular contributor to *Middle East International* and the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*. He has written five must-read books on the Middle East.

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## Jewish Defense League Unleashes Campaign of Violence in America



**Donald Neff**  
Former Israel Bureau Chief for Time Magazine

**I**t was 29 years ago, on Aug. 29, 1970, that the Soviet government newspaper *Izvestia* protested repeated attacks by members of the Jewish Defense League against Soviet diplomats in New York and demanded better U.S. protection.<sup>1</sup>

A series of harassments, demonstrations and physical attacks against Soviet offices and personnel in New York had been launched by the JDL at the end of 1969 and continued over the next two years. The militant JDL actions included forcefully occupying some offices, spray painting Hebrew

slogans proclaiming “the Jewish nation lives,” disrupting public meetings and even bombings and shootings. JDL co-founder Meir Kahane, a rabid Jewish activist from Brooklyn, later publicly admitted the JDL “bombed the Russian mission in New York, the Russian cultural mission here [Washington] in 1970, the Soviet trade offices.”<sup>2</sup>

The aim of the campaign was to draw attention to the 2.1 million Jews living in the Soviet Union. Unknown to the public was the fact that the anti-Soviet actions were being orchestrated by several militant Israelis, including the Mossad spy agency; Yitzhak Shamir, later Israel’s prime minister, and Guelah Cohen, a leader of the extremist Tehiya Party and member of the Knesset. The Israelis persuaded Kahane to wage the anti-Soviet campaign. The goal was to strain U.S.–Soviet relations, calculating that Moscow would ease the strain by allowing increased numbers of Soviet Jews to emigrate to Israel.<sup>3</sup>

A 1985 FBI study of terrorist acts in the United States since 1981 found 18 incidents initiated by Jews, 15 of the acts by the JDL.<sup>4</sup> In a 1986 study of domestic terrorism, the Department of Energy concluded: “For more than a decade, the Jewish Defense League (JDL) has been one of the most active terrorist groups in the United States....Since 1968, JDL operations have killed 7 persons and wounded at least 22. Thirty-nine percent of the targets were connected with the Soviet Union; 9 percent were Palestinian; 8 percent were Lebanese; 6 percent, Egyptian; 4 percent, French, Iranian, and Iraqi; 1 percent, Polish and German; and 23 percent were not connected with any states. Sixty-two percent of all JDL actions are directed against property; 30 percent against businesses; 4 percent against academics and academic institutions; and 2 percent against religious targets.”<sup>5</sup>

The JDL was suspected in two high-profile murders over the years. One came in 1972 when a bomb exploded in impresario Sol Hurok’s Manhattan office on Jan. 26. The explosion killed his receptionist, Iris Kones, 27, while Hurok and 12 others were injured. The JDL was suspected because Hurok was bringing Soviet performers to the United States.<sup>6</sup>

The next year, Jerome Zeller, an American JDL member, was indicted on charges of planting the bomb at Hurok’s office. He had since moved to Israel and his extradition was requested. Israeli authorities arrested the American expatriate but released him on \$1,200 bail. He later was wounded in the 1973 war. Afterwards, the U.S. again requested extradition, but the response was, said U.S. Attorney Joseph Jaffe, who prosecuted the case, “You can...hold your breath until

5. Department of Energy, *Terrorism in the United States and the Potential Threat to Nuclear Facilities*, R-3351-DOE, January 1986, pp. 11-16.
6. *Facts on File 1972*, p. 71. Kahane essentially admitted to the Hurok bombing, telling Friedman that he felt “horrible” about it. See Robert I. Friedman, “How Shamir Used JDL Terrorism,” *The Nation*, 10/31/88.
7. Robert I. Friedman, “Did this Man Kill Alex Odeh?” *Village Voice*, 7/12/88.
8. *New York Times*, 10/12/85. Also see Robert I. Friedman, “Who Killed Alex Odeh?” *Village Voice*, 11/24/87; Department of Energy, *Terrorism in the United States and the Potential Threat to Nuclear Facilities*, R-3351-DOE, January 1986, pp. 11-16, quoted in Nakhleh, *Encyclopedia of the Palestine Problem*, p. 863.
9. Robert I. Friedman, “Did this Man Kill Alex Odeh?” *Village Voice*, 7/12/88. Also see *New York Times*, 11/9/85; Nakhleh, *Encyclopedia of the Palestine Problem*, pp. 864-65.
10. *New York Times*, 12/19/85.
11. Sabra Chartrand, *New York Times*, 3/26/91. Also see *ADC Times*, March-April 1991; Jay Mallin, *Washington Times*, 6/21/90.
12. Edward Said, “The Essential Terrorist,” in Said and Hitchens, *Blaming the Victims*, p. 157.
13. Sabra Chartrand, *New York Times*, 3/26/91. Also see Robert I. Friedman in *Gentleman’s Quarterly*, October 1991, whose story on the sixth anniversary of Odeh’s killing provides extensive background on the suspected killers and their involvement with the JDL.
14. ADC, “Robert Manning Found Guilty of Complicity in Wilkerson Murder,” *ADC Times*, October 1993.
15. Associated Press, *New York Times*, 3/19/94.
16. Associated Press, *New York Times*, 3/19/94.
17. Glenn Frankel, *Washington Post*, 8/12/84; Donald Neff, *Washington Times*, 7/26/84, 8/14/84; Dan Fisher, *Los Angeles Times*, 8/14/84; William Clairborne, *Washington Post*, 8/25/85.
18. *New York Times*, 7/27/84.
19. *Ibid.*, 10/5/85.
20. *Ibid.*, 2/21/87.
21. *Ibid.*, 8/14/84.
22. *Ibid.*, 8/5/85.
23. *Ibid.*, 9/9/85. For reaction of U.S. Jews, see *New York Times*, 11/29/85.
24. *Ibid.*, 10/6/88.
25. Joel Brinkley, *New York Times*, 10/17/88.
26. Michael Specter, *Washington Post*, 11/6/90.
27. John Kifner, *New York Times*, 11/9/90.
28. Joseph P. Fried, *New York Times*, 1/18/96.
29. Michael Specter and Laurie Goodstein, *Washington Post*, 11/7/90; John Kifner, *New York Times*, 11/7/90.
30. Jackson Diehl, *Washington Post*, 11/8/90.
31. Laurie Goodstein, *Washington Post*, 12/5/90.
32. Richard C. Gross, *Washington Times*, 11/7/90.
33. John Kifner, *New York Times*, 11/11/90. For an assessment of Kahane’s impact, see Robert I. Friedman, *New York Times* Op-ed page, 11/7/90; Friedman was an expert on Kahane and had written a biography of him called *False Prophet*. Also see Sprinzak, *The Ascendancy of Israel’s Radical Right*.

ideas “had crept into the mainstream” in Israel. Dr. Ehud Sprinzak, an Israeli expert on far right activities in Israel, wrote: “Where he has succeeded is in changing the thinking of many Israelis toward anti-Arab feelings and violence. He forced the more respectable parties to change. In the 1970s Kahane was in the political wilderness, but by the 1980s the center had moved toward Kahane.” Today Kahane’s policy of “transfer” is openly discussed as never before and one political party, Moledet, with one Knesset seat, has ethnic cleansing as its single issue. Observed the Jewish Telegraph Agency: “Rabbi Kahane could die satisfied that his message has impacted deeply and widely throughout Israeli society.”<sup>33</sup>

### RECOMMENDED READING

- Friedman, Robert I., *The False Prophet: Rabbi Meir Kahane*, Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1990.
- Friedman, Robert I., *Zealots for Zion: Inside Israel’s West Bank Settlement Movement*, New York, Random House, 1992.
- Halsell, Grace, *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War*, Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1986.
- Karp, Yehudit, *The Karp Report: Investigation of Suspicions Against Israelis in Judea and Samaria*, Jerusalem, Israeli Government, 1984.
- Nakhleh, Issa, *Encyclopedia of the Palestine Problem* (2 vols), New York: Intercontinental Books, 1991.
- Said, Edward W., *The Question of Palestine*, New York: Times Books, 1980.
- Said, Edward W. and Christopher Hitchens (eds.), *Blaming the Victims*, New York: Verso, 1988.
- Sprinzak, Ehud, *The Ascendance of Israel’s Radical Right*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

### ENDNOTES

1. *New York Times*, 8/30/70. See Friedman, *The False Prophet*, which provides an excellent examination of Kahane and the JDL. Also see Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics*, who reports that among Kahane’s American supporters were many Jewish millionaires, including Reuben Mattus, founder of Haagen-Dazs ice cream (with which Mattus no longer is affiliated).
2. Carla Hall, *Washington Post*, 9/11/84. The Russian cultural center was actually bombed in 1971; see Robert F. Levey, *Washington Post*, 1/9/71; also see Robert I. Friedman, “How Shamir Used JDL Terrorism,” *The Nation*, 10/31/88.
3. Friedman, *The False Prophet*, pp. 105-07. For a revealing report on how Israel’s Yitzhak Shamir and other far rightists used the JDL, see Robert I. Friedman, “How Shamir Used JDL Terrorism,” *The Nation*, 10/31/88.
4. Justice Department, *Analysis of Terrorist Incidents and Terrorist Related Activities in the United States*, pp. 16-18.

you die cause you ain’t going to get him because he’s a national hero.” Zeller was later reported living in the occupied West Bank among militant settlers.<sup>7</sup>

### KAHANE BECAME AN OUTSPOKEN ADVOCATE FOR THE “TRANSFER” OF ALL PALESTINIANS.

The other high-profile murder came in 1985, on Oct. 11, when Alex Odeh, 37, regional director of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) in Santa Ana, California, was killed by a bomb planted at his office. Odeh had appeared the previous night on a television show and called Yasser Arafat a “man of peace.” The Jewish Defense League praised the bombing but denied involvement, its usual practice in such incidents.<sup>8</sup>

One of the suspects was Robert Manning, 36, of Los Angeles, a JDL member. He and his wife, Rochelle, moved to Israel, where he joined the Israel Defense Forces. FBI agents said Manning and others were also suspected of being involved in a year-long series of violent incidents in 1985 including the August house-bomb slaying of Tschirim Soobzokov, of Paterson, N.J., a suspected Nazi war criminal; the Aug. 16 attempted bombing of the Boston ADC office in which two policemen were severely wounded; the September bombing at the Brentwood, Long Island home of alleged Nazi Elmars Sprogis, in which a 23-year-old passerby lost a leg, and the Oct. 29 fire at the ADC office in Washington, DC, which was called arson.<sup>9</sup>

By December 1985, FBI Director William H. Webster warned that Arab Americans had entered a “zone of danger” and were targets of an unnamed group seeking to harm the “enemies of Israel.”<sup>10</sup>

Manning and his wife lived in the radical Kiryat Arba settlement in Israel’s occupied West Bank until March 25, 1991 when, after two years of pressure, Israel acceded to U.S. extradition demands.<sup>11</sup>

The case caused critics to charge U.S. media bias against Arabs, noting that a week earlier the killing of American Jew Leon Klinghoffer aboard the hijacked *Achille Lauro* received heavy media coverage. They pointed out *The New York Times* devoted 1,043 column inches to Klinghoffer while devoting only 14 inches to Odeh’s death.<sup>12</sup>

Israeli police finally arrested the Mannings on March 24, 1991. Although strongly suspected in the Odeh murder, they were charged in a separate suit

involving the 1980 letter-bomb murder of California secretary Patricia Wilkerson.<sup>13</sup> Robert Manning, but not his wife, was eventually extradited to the United States on July 18, 1993, and was found guilty on Oct. 14, 1993, of complicity in the Wilkerson murder.<sup>14</sup>

On Feb. 7, 1994, Manning was sentenced to life in prison.<sup>15</sup> His wife died of a heart attack on March 18, 1994, in an Israeli prison while awaiting extradition.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, Kahane had moved to Israel in 1971 and immediately became an outspoken advocate for the “transfer” of all Palestinians. His unabashed public voicing of a subject that Israelis had spoken about only privately for so long earned him instant popularity among the most radical of Israelis. He founded the Kach Party. Kach in Hebrew means “Thus!” and Israelis understood that the party’s name referred to the use of violence to ethnically cleanse the land. By 1984 Kahane was popular enough to win a seat in the 120-seat Knesset under the Kach banner.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time Kahane retained his U.S. passport, which he used frequently to keep in touch with his followers in the JDL in America.<sup>18</sup>

In October 1985, the State Department declared Kahane was no longer a U.S. citizen based on his acceptance of a Knesset seat and his statement that he had retained his citizenship only as a matter of convenience.<sup>19</sup> However, Federal Judge Leo I. Glasser ruled in 1987 that Kahane could not be deprived of his U.S. citizenship since Americans are allowed dual citizenship.<sup>20</sup>

When Kahane appeared in the Knesset to take his oath, 2,000 demonstrators protested and a number of lawmakers denounced him.<sup>21</sup> Within a year, however, Kahane was described by *The New York Times* as the most talked-about political figure in Israel whose popularity was soaring, especially among young voters.<sup>22</sup> A September 1985 poll showed that Kahane’s popularity had increased to the point that if elections had been held at the time, his party would have received 10 seats in the Knesset, making Kach a significant political force.<sup>23</sup>

Such popularity of Kahane’s racist views was disturbing to liberal Israelis, and particularly to their U.S. supporters, who for so long had portrayed Palestinians as racists out to get rid of Jews. Now Kahane was giving Zionism’s critics powerful proof that Israel was a racist state. On Oct. 17, 1988, Israel’s High Court of Justice ruled that Meir Kahane’s political party was ineligible to take part

in elections because it was “racist” and “undemocratic.”<sup>24</sup> It was the first time in Israel’s history that a political party had been outlawed. Polls at the time showed that Kach would have likely received three to four seats in the coming November elections.<sup>25</sup>

Kahane’s end came in 1990 at the age of 58. He was shot dead on Nov. 5, 1990 in New York City in a midtown hotel.<sup>26</sup> The suspect was El Sayyid A. Nosair, 34, an Egyptian-born Muslim who was a naturalized American living in Cliffside Park, N.J. He was a graduate of Egypt’s Hilwan University and worked as an air conditioning repairman for New York City. Police said Nosair had been under psychiatric care and taking anti-depressant drugs.<sup>27</sup>

Nosair was acquitted by a Manhattan jury on Dec. 21, 1991, but on Jan. 17, 1996 he was sentenced to a life term after he was convicted in a new trial of involvement in the assassination and also of conspiracy to commit terrorism with Egyptian Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, the alleged mastermind of the [1993] World Trade Center bombing.<sup>28</sup>

As many as 30,000 mourners attended Kahane’s funeral in Brooklyn on Nov. 6, 1990, hailing him as “a pillar of Zion” and “a prophet who has fallen for the sacred land.” They carried placards reading “Death to all Arabs” and “Revenge.” Said Sol Margolis, president of Kach International, the U.S. arm of Kahane’s party in Israel: “There will be revenge. We believe in revenge.”<sup>29</sup>

The next day in Jerusalem, on Nov, 7, some 15,000 persons held a four-hour funeral procession, shouting “death to the Arabs.”<sup>30</sup>

In mid-November, 10 persons received letters threatening violence in revenge for Kahane’s death. They included Columbia University Professor Edward Said, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan and Clovis Maksoud, former U.N. ambassador of the Arab League.<sup>31</sup>

Kahane’s supporters in Israel also vowed revenge, adding: “Whoever thinks that Kahane and the Kach movement have been destroyed has made a great mistake.” Said Kach member Yoel Ben-David: “I promise you there will be a river of Arab blood.”<sup>32</sup>

During his years, Kahane had succeeded well beyond most expectations in changing the political landscape of Israel. *New York Times* correspondent John Kifner reported that Kahane had been successful in the sense that many of his

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