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Vengeance: The Story of Jewish Terrorism

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For years, there was a prevailing sense among the Israeli public that the terms “terror” and “Jewish” did not go together. Although the “Jewish Underground” carried out terrorist attacks against Palestinians for several years starting in the late 1970s, the phenomenon was perceived as unique and anomalous. Since then, however, with the expansion and increasing frequency of violent attacks against Palestinians by Jews from the radical right (perpetrated by organized groups, or individuals), the term “Jewish terrorism” has become accepted and entrenched in media and public discourse. There *is* terrorism carried out by Jews. This

phenomenon is the focus of the book by Roy Sharon, a journalist and commentator, who was formerly a correspondent in the Palestinian territories for Channel 10 and is now a military and security affairs analyst for Kan 11.

The book begins with a general chapter that provides a historical overview of the phenomenon and bears a quasi-theoretical nature. Within this framework, several definitions of terrorism, coined by widely-recognized experts on the issue, are quoted, highlighting the difficulty in reaching an agreed-upon classification. For example, Ehud Sprinzak describes terrorism as the use of severe violence against non-combatant civilians as a symbolic act and tool for conveying a frightening message to the broader public. However, this definition is problematic, especially from an Israeli viewpoint, since in Israel, even blatant violence against security forces, when carried out by Palestinian actors, is considered a terrorist attack. More appropriate for Sharon’s book is the definition proposed by the American scholar Bruce Hoffman, of terrorism as “the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change.”

The objective of Jewish terrorism is to instigate profound political change in the Israeli-Palestinian context through a sequence of violent acts—irrespective of whether these acts stem from the organized planning of a group or the spontaneous initiative of individuals. Regardless of the specific case or actor, terrorism perpetrated by Jews aims to mobilize a transformation within Israeli society and its political framework by intensifying friction and tension between Palestinians and Jews across the West Bank, thereby exacerbating relations within the broader conflict zone. According to Roy Sharon, the motivation for provoking this change is driven by three intertwined factors. Foremost among them, as indicated by the book’s title, is the desire to avenge Palestinian attacks on Jews. The perceived legitimacy for

such revenge is grounded, according to the Jewish terrorists' perspective, in tradition and religious commandments. Another motivation is the preservation of the Land of Israel under Jewish-Israeli control and sovereignty. This motive was distinctly evidenced in the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 by a right-wing extremist, in the aftermath of a demonstration organized under the slogan "No to Violence [within Israeli society itself]." Rabin's assassination, which is not explored in the book, was a direct assault on the core of Israeli society, causing profound psychological and political damage. Historically, in the context of the collapse of trust in the potential for the Oslo Accords to reach their desired solution—namely, negotiations for a permanent settlement—the impact was devastating. The third motivation is the "hastening of the end," meaning the acceleration of the redemption of the people and the land through violent provocation that would inflame the conflict and galvanize the entire Jewish public into action to assert Israeli sovereignty over all territories of the land.

The importance of Roy Sharon's book lies in its sharp focus on the systematic violation of law and order, and the responsibility and obligation placed squarely on the Israeli government and security establishment to address related developments with greater urgency and determination. The writing is compelling, and the reading of the book is engaging, but beyond that, it should serve as a wake-up call to the Israeli public to pay more attention to this troubling issue that challenges the security apparatus, while the response of the Israeli public at large is often marked by indifference.

Roy Sharon's book centers on Jewish terrorist incidents and the individuals behind them. Their shared traits are evident and indeed represent a blend of the three motivational factors outlined above:

Over the past decades, extremist right-wing activists, proponents of Greater Israel, have taken matters into their own hands, carrying out acts of terror. Among them were activists known as "Kach," a minority with a superficial ideology rooted in hatred of Arabs. Most hailed from the religious-nationalist fringe, influenced by the strict and extremist teachings of Rabbi Meir Kahane. They included members of the settler generation, hilltop youth, with anti-establishment, post-Zionist, and zealous religious beliefs, acting out of disgust for the old guard of the religious bloc and disillusionment with the leadership of the established settlers and state institutions. Many did not complete high school, and some embraced the complex Chabad messianic ideology of Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh.

The structure of the book aligns with this approach of illustrating and discussing cases of Jewish terror and their perpetrators, with each one meticulously detailed, covering the attacks themselves, the pursuits of the attackers, their arrests, and their encounters with their Shin Bet (the General Security Services) interrogators. The author, a media expert, brings a narrative-documentary style to the book. Essentially, it can be viewed as a series of articles that examine specific cases. This analysis of Jewish terrorist incidents in the West Bank as individual occurrences is also evident in the approach of the U.S. government towards them, opting to impose personal sanctions on extreme right-wing operatives.

However, beyond the individual incidents, a highly problematic phenomenon emerges both from the perspective of Israeli and Palestinian security and from a social standpoint within Israeli society. Its political and policy implications are numerous and complex. The

scope of the phenomenon is undeniably wide, and its frequency is currently increasing to the extent that it is now expected that in response to a Palestinian terrorist attack, particularly the murder of Jews, there will follow a swift, violent retaliation—a Jewish terrorist act against Palestinians. At times, it becomes a full-blown pogrom, involving numerous participants.

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Herein lies the weakness of the book: the processes of right-wing radicalization that Israeli society has undergone over the years, directly linked to the phenomenon of Jewish terrorism, as well as its problematic and cumulative implications for the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, are not thoroughly explored. Such shifts are evidenced in the not infrequent calls, following a Palestinian terrorist attack, to expand the settlement enterprise in the West Bank. There have been instances where this call has been positively responded to, and it has translated into actual expansion of settlement construction in the Territories. Jewish terrorist activists cannot help but see in this response an institutional recognition of aspirations for vengeance, land redemption, and the coming of the messiah—motivations that also justify unauthorized violence against Palestinians.

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