

Meir Kahane's 'friends in high places' covered up 20 years of terrorism

by Jeffrey Steinberg

On Oct. 11, 1985, a sophisticated pipe bomb blew up the Santa Monica, California office of the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee (AADC), killing its regional director, Alex Odeh. Hours before the blast, a member of the Jewish Defense League who had planted the bomb boarded a plane at Los Angeles International Airport and returned to Israel. Within moments of the blast, three JDLers were identified by FBI agents present at the scene as the authors of the bombing.

How did the FBI know the identities, and even the travel itineraries, of the men whom FBI Director William Webster would later gratuitously identify as America's most dangerous terrorists? Two of the JDLers, Keith Fuchs and Andy Green, had been followed from New York to Los Angeles via Minneapolis by an FBI surveillance team. The FBI team "lost" the JDLers as soon as they arrived on the West Coast, less than 24 hours before the bombing. Travel agency records pulled by the FBI furthermore showed that the JDLers' plane tickets—including their escape route to Israel—had been paid in advance on an American Express Card in the name of a third member of the bomb team, Robert Manning. Manning was already a suspect in a 1980 murder-for-hire case involving a real estate dispute between JDL moneybags William Ross and a rival.

All three men escaped to Israel despite the FBI surveillance, and despite the fact that they had carried out a string of bombings all across the United States beginning in August.

Alex Odeh was the second person killed in the attacks. On Aug. 15, 1985, a similar sophisticated bomb had blown up Tscherim Soobzokov, a Circassian-American who had been falsely accused by the U.S. Justice Department of Nazi war crimes and who had been under intense harassment by JDL member Mordechai Levy in the days leading up to the bombing of his home in Paterson, New Jersey. Soobzokov died several months later from the wounds inflicted in the bomb attack. During the 1985 JDL bombing spree, AADC offices were blown up in Washington and Boston, and the Long Island, New York home of another alleged Nazi war criminal, Elmars Sprogis, was blown up.

The escape of Manning, Fuchs, and Green was in all likelihood not just a case of sloppy police work. JDL terror squads had been roaming the United States for decades with

impunity, targeting Soviet diplomats and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) officials. And although nearly every prominent member of the JDL had been arrested at one time or other on petty charges, the group had never been subjected to serious legal scrutiny. Even after the 1985 murder-bombing spree, the JDL continued to enjoy an astounding degree of immunity from prosecution. According to a former AADC official who cooperated closely with the FBI following the assassination of Alex Odeh, one shamefaced FBI agent admitted to him that the U.S. Justice Department would never bring charges against the JDL killers, "for political reasons." The best the AADC could hope for, he was told, was that the JDL hit teams would be banned from returning to the United States.

The Feb. 25 massacre at Hebron is one legacy of that coverup. To fully understand the "political reasons" behind the coverup of the Odeh and Soobzokov murders, it is crucial to look back at the career of the late Rabbi Meir Kahane, founder of the Jewish Defense League and its Israeli affiliate, the Kach Movement. Throughout his career, Kahane enjoyed the patronage and protection of a collection of "friends in high places." By the time Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as President of the United States in January 1981, these "friends" had graduated into prominent positions in the national security and law enforcement establishments of both the United States and Israel. Their continuing influence—even following Kahane's assassination on Nov. 5, 1990—is one pivotal reason why the events in Hebron could occur.

From Jabotinsky to J. Edgar Hoover

Meir Kahane was the son of Charles and Sonia Kahane. His father was a close ally of Vladimir Jabotinsky, the founder of the so-called Revisionist Movement and the Betar and Irgun militant Zionist organizations. During Kahane's youth, Jabotinsky stayed at the Kahane house during fundraising trips to New York, and Meir became a Betar activist in his early teens. His mother had been a young revolutionary during the Russian Revolution of 1905. Through a childhood friend from Brooklyn named Joseph Churba, Meir Kahane was drawn into the world of American and Israeli cloaks and daggers by the early 1960s. Churba had been commuting between Israel, Washington, and New York since the mid-

1950s, working as a stringer for a variety of intelligence agencies. By 1963, Rabbi Meir Kahane, using the pseudonym "Michael King," was working for the FBI's Division Five as an infiltrator inside the John Birch Society. The JBS, along with a wide range of Communist front groups, was a target of the FBI's Cointelpro ("Counterintelligence Program"). According to author Robert I. Friedman, who penned a 1990 unauthorized biography of Kahane, "King" gathered information on the Birch Society's financial angels, who would then be visited and strong-armed by FBI agents.

In the spring of 1965, as the war in Vietnam was intensifying, Kahane and Churba founded a group called the July Fourth Movement to agitate on behalf of the U.S. war effort on American college campuses and within the Jewish community. The patrons of the effort were unnamed "U.S. government agencies" and the AFL-CIO's International Affairs Department. IAD was a well-known conduit for CIA operations, and the July Fourth Movement was clearly one of those domestic CIA fronts. The group was sponsored by two well-known ex-members of the Communist Party "right opposition" members-turned-CIA operatives nominally affiliated with the labor movement: Jay Lovestone and Irving Brown.

Churba and Kahane pitched the July Fourth idea to the two CIA operators, and the cash register was opened. Joining Kahane and Churba as the "campus coordinators" of the project were Irving Brown's son Robert, then a student at New York University, and Roy Godson, son of another CIA labor operator, who was finishing his graduate studies at Columbia University. The July Fourth project never built a very large following, but it provided a steady cash flow to Kahane and Churba, who in 1968 wrote a propaganda book called *The Jewish Stake in Vietnam*, published by a (probably CIA-backed) publishing house in New York City, Crossroads Publishers.

In 1968, Kahane made a brief trip to Israel, where he met with a number of his father's old Betar cronies, including Menachem Begin. On the day he returned to New York, June 18, 1968, Kahane held the founding meeting of the Jewish Defense League (JDL). Although he clearly had received the imprimatur of the old Irgun-Stern Gang crowd in Israel, Kahane continued to play ball with the FBI. During its first 18 months of existence, the JDL focused nearly all of its efforts against the black militant movement, particularly the Black Panther Party, charging it with anti-Semitism.

JDL goon squads battled black activists in the melting pot neighborhoods of Brooklyn and Manhattan. By September 1969, according to documents released under the Freedom of Information Act, the FBI had decided to integrate the JDL into its covert Cointelpro campaign to disrupt the civil rights and black militant movements. On Sept. 5, the special agent in charge of the New York FBI Field Office wrote to Director Hoover: "The NYO is presently considering an attempt to contact and establish some rapport with the Jewish Defense League in order to be in a position to furnish it with informa-

tion the Bureau wishes to see utilized in a counter-intelligence technique." By Sept. 22, 1969, FBI Division Five chief G.C. Moore was already writing a memo to Bureau Deputy Director William Sullivan outlining the FBI-JDL collusion: "The Black Panther Party, as well as other extremist groups, are anti-Semitic in nature. Many instances of anti-Semitism by the BPP have been noted. This information, when placed in the hands of JDL could easily operate against the best interest of the BPP with resultant disruption. It is our intent to create a fictitious source of information who will furnish . . . data to Rabbi Meir Kahane."

The FBI solicited the cooperation of two agencies in steering the JDL against the Black Panthers: the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). In 1967, the ADL had upgraded its longstanding collusion with the FBI by creating an in-house Fact-Finding Department under the direction of Irwin Suall, a Jay Lovestone protégé who had been trained in labor counterinsurgency at the Ruskin Labor College at Oxford University. Suall's young deputy, Carl Gershman, was assigned to gather data from ADL assets on university campuses and in political and labor groups across the country, and to assemble intelligence reports on the Black Panther Party and other militant groups, which were then forwarded to J. Edgar Hoover.

HUAC staff investigator Herb Romerstein, another ex-Communist who worked closely with both the FBI and the ADL, was assigned the task of promoting Kahane as an "expert" on black militant organizations. Romerstein paraded Kahane before HUAC public hearings, and personally set up shop at the JDL's New York City office. During this same period, Romerstein was running his own "private" Cointelpro operation in partnership with a British-born spook named John Rees. Rees's current front group, the Maldon Institute, is openly financed by the ADL.

In the late 1960s, under the cover of a consulting firm called National Goals, Romerstein and Rees provided advice to police departments in New Jersey and New York on how to counter black activism. Through his office at JDL headquarters, Romerstein funnelled FBI and ADL information to Kahane, who in turn sent his JDL minions into a series of widely publicized street clashes with the Black Panthers.

Shifting targets

According to Robert I. Friedman, in December 1969 Kahane was visited in New York by Geula Cohen, another old Irgun terrorist, then a member of the Israel's parliament, the Knesset. Cohen was brought to Kahane by Bernard Deutch, the head of the powerful Brooklyn chapter of the ADL and then the head of an ad hoc group called the International League for the Repatriation of Russian Jews. The ILRRJ was trumpeted on Capitol Hill by a young staffer for Sen. Henry Jackson (D-Wash.) named Richard Perle.

The Deutch-Cohen message to Kahane was very simple:

The JDL should refocus its efforts away from the Black Panthers, and go after Soviet and Arab diplomats, making their lives miserable. In return, Kahane would receive heavy financial backing from Israeli and American Jabotinskyite circles, conduited through the ADL's Deutch; and military training would be provided for his young hooligans from veterans of the old Stern Gang terrorist underground. Yitzhak Shamir, then the chief of operations for the Israeli intelligence service, the Mossad, and later Israel's prime minister, was the third member of the triumvirate that directed Kahane and the JDL terror offensive.

ADL honcho Deutch was a busy man during the early 1970s, shuttling between Israel, Switzerland, and New York, passing marching orders and cash into Kahane's hands. After August 1971, when Kahane moved to Israel, Deutch functioned as de facto controller of the JDL, while maintaining his role with the ADL and ILRRJ. Deutch's career as a Mossad super-spook was cut short in 1975 when he was convicted of stock fraud and tax evasion. According to Burt Zweibon, a co-founder of JDL who now heads Americans for a Safe Israel (ASI), a hard-line Zionist lobbying group, if the full story about Deutch's dirty financial operation had come out at trial, the JDL would have been finished.

Kahane backers thrive under Reagan-Casey

While Kahane settled in Israel, his JDL minions continued their non-stop terror campaign, with little interference from American or Israeli authorities. By the mid-1970s, JDL paramilitary training camps in the Catskill Mountains of New York and in the Israeli-occupied West Bank were being directed by Amihai Paglin, the one-time Irgun chief of operations, who in 1977 was appointed by newly elected Likud Prime Minister Menachem Begin as his "terror against terror" chief. The Office of Terror Against Terror ran a wide range of covert operations, including assassinations of perceived enemies of the Israeli state; it was an open secret that the JDL squads were integrated into those operations.

At the same time, many of the Kahane's most enthusiastic supporters and collaborators during the JDL's formative years were rising through the ranks of the intelligence and law enforcement establishment in America. By the time Ronald Reagan was in the White House, their credentials were impressive:

- **Joseph Churba**, Kahane's oldest friend and the man who introduced the young rabbi into the world of spooks, was senior Middle East advisor to the Reagan transition team, and later a policy adviser to the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Churba's "private" think tank, the Center for International Security, had all the earmarks of a joint CIA-Mossad front, featuring Israeli spy chief Rafi Eytan and a number of Pentagon and CIA veterans on its speakers bureau.

- **Herb Romerstein**, the HUAC staffer and Anti-Defamation League collaborator, became a senior analyst at the U.S. Information Agency, responsible for monitoring Soviet

disinformation operations.

- **Carl Gershman**, the ADL fact-finder, was appointed to head up the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), an important front for White House covert activities involving Col. Oliver North and the entire Iran-Contra crowd. Gershman tapped David Lowe, a career ADL employee, as his chief deputy.

- **Roy Godson**, the campus leader of Kahane's July Fourth Movement, was brought onto the staff of the National Security Council, also specializing in Soviet intelligence operations. Godson's White House work also involved Dr. Uri Ra'an, a former Mossad officer, then running a graduate program in national security studies at Tufts University's Fletcher School of Diplomacy in Boston. Ra'an was the original recruiter of Israeli-Soviet spy Jonathan Jay Pollard, as well as the ADL's Washington D.C. fact-finder Mira Lansky Boland. Another member of the Godson White House team was career CIA officer **Walter Raymond**, who got his start in clandestine operations in London, working with Godson's father. Raymond ran a secret White House unit known as Public Diplomacy, which ran cover for the North-Soviet Iran-Contra operations by coordinating private sector support for the Reagan-Bush administration's covert programs.

Kidnappings and killings

With friends like these in positions of power in Washington, it is no wonder that in August 1983, Kahane decided it was safe to send some of his most hard-core terrorist thugs back to America to escalate the terror. In August 1983, Andy Green, Kahane's personal secretary at Kach Movement headquarters, and Robert Manning moved back to New York City, where they set up a private investigative firm. The firm specialized in kidnapping and "deprogramming" members of groups characterized as "cults." The business was lucrative, and it represented yet another point of convergence between Kahane's thugs and the ADL, which is a principal sponsor of the Cult Awareness Network (CAN), a nationwide kidnap-for-hire underground. Galen Kelly, the chief kidnapper-deprogrammer of the CAN, worked during the same time frame for Graham Knowles Associates, another New York City private investigations firm that, according to several sources, was and still remains a front for ADL. Kelly regularly used JDLers and members of the Lubavitcher sect as kidnapers. Kelly admitted in interviews that the CAN apparatus enjoyed a virtual "license to kidnap" from federal authorities, especially the FBI.

On Feb. 20, 1985, Green and Manning were briefly detained by police in Warwick, Rhode Island after a suite they had rented since the previous October, at the Suisse Chalet Hotel, was raided. The hotel was their safehouse for holding their kidnap victims. The man who rented the suite, Boston area JDL backer Leonard Leitner, was arrested for cocaine trafficking at around the same time.