

WHO KILLED ALEX ODEH?

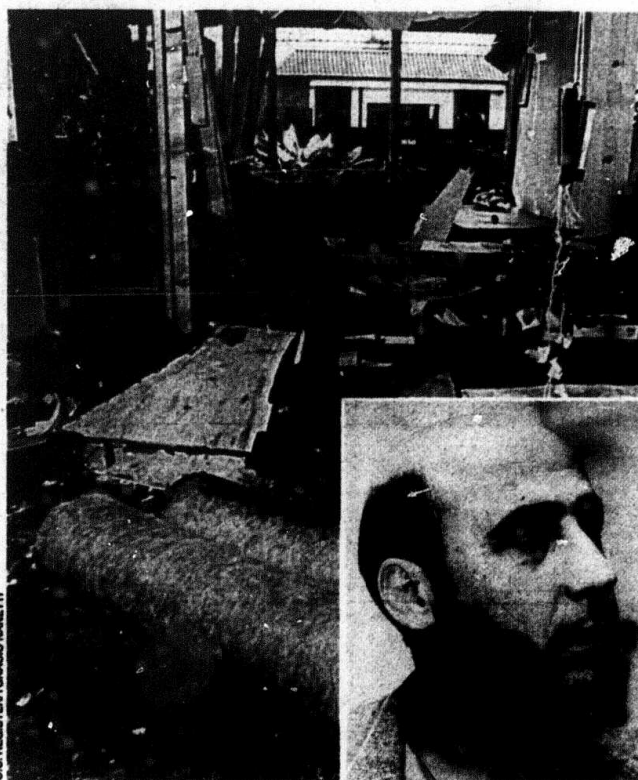
FBI Probe of JDL Bombers Gets No Help From Israelis

A high level federal investigation of the Jewish Defense League, which the FBI believes is responsible for a string of recent terrorist bombings that killed two persons including an Arab-American in California, is being impeded by the government of Israel, asserts a Justice Department document obtained by the Voice. The document states that the FBI's efforts to prosecute the JDL have been hamstrung because of the reluctance of Israeli authorities to assist the United States in following up investigative leads that point to JDL founder Rabbi Meir Kahane's followers in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Israeli government responses to repeated FBI requests for information about JDL murder suspects now residing in Israel "have been untimely, incomplete and in certain cases no response was rendered," said assistant FBI director Floyd I. Clarke in the memo to Oliver Revell, executive assistant director of the bureau.

Israel, the largest recipient of U.S. aid, advertises itself as a bulwark against terrorism in the Middle East, and has often chastised America for not combating Arab terrorism vigorously enough. But Israel's apparent lack of cooperation with the FBI in the JDL investigation calls into question its sincerity in prosecuting the war against terrorism when the terrorism emanates from Israel itself. An Israeli justice ministry spokesman in Jerusalem declined to comment about U.S. government allegations of non-cooperation.

A federal grand jury in Brooklyn is currently probing the JDL in connection with bombings, homicides, extortion, and kidnapping, according to Assistant U.S. Attorney Charles Rose. Asked if Kahane is himself under investigation for complicity in the homicides, Rose replied: "We are investigating the JDL for homicides, and Kahane's leadership [of the JDL] is being questioned, so you can draw your own conclusions." Kahane ostensibly stepped down as head of the JDL following his Knesset victory in 1984, but according to JDL officials, he remains its "spiritual advisor."

According to sources familiar with the U.S. government probe, the primary murder suspects come from a group of about 35 hardcore JDL members, primarily from the New York area, who routinely ferry back and forth between the U.S. and Israel, where they are involved in Rabbi Kahane's violently anti-Arab *Kach* party. According to these sources, the suspects often travel here on Israeli passports under their Hebrew names, making it more difficult for U.S. authorities to track their movements. For example, Israeli officials reportedly did not inform the FBI when Yehuda Richter, a JDL official from Los Angeles who was convicted in a 1984 attack on a West



O.C. REGISTER/OMAR HANETI

October 1985: The murderers of Alex Odeh (inset) may be hiding in Israel.

Bank Arab bus, traveled to the U.S. last September following his early release from prison. Like Richter, many of the JDL-Kach party activists have been arrested for anti-Arab terrorist violence in Israel; some of those arrested had received Israeli army training.

U.S. government sources say several individuals from this group who are now in Israel are the prime suspects in the October 1985 pipe-bomb murder of Alex Odeh, an official of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, in Santa Ana, California; the August 1985 house-bomb slaying of Tscherrim Soobzokov of Paterson, New Jersey, an alleged Nazi war criminal; the September 1985 bomb explosion at the Brentwood, Long Island, home of alleged Nazi Elmar Sprogis, in which a 23-year-old passerby lost a leg; and the August 1985 attempted bombing of an ADC office in Boston in which two police officers were severely wounded.

According to the government document obtained by the Voice, the FBI "has developed several key suspects, many of

whom have fled the United States and sought asylum in Kiryat Arba"—a large, ultranationalist Jewish settlement on the West Bank—which the document describes as "a 'haven' for right-wing Jewish extremist elements."

The document states: "numerous leads have been forwarded through FBIHQ to the Israeli Secret Intelligence Service (ISIS) in Washington, D.C. Response to these leads is crucial for the solution of the 25 terrorist incidents and other criminal activity perpetrated by the JDL. Lead requests were for telephone subscriber information, criminal background information, arrest records, prison contacts, associates, residence status, and travel documentations.... The Terrorism Section has had numerous meetings with ISIS representatives in Washington, D.C., during which our concerns relative to their handling of our requests were raised. Although these discussions have sometimes resulted in a temporary 'flurry' of activity on their part, no sustained improvement in the flow of information has been realized."

"I'm astonished to hear that there is no cooperation," with the FBI on the JDL case, says General Yehoshua Caspi, the Israel police representative in the United States. Caspi said the Israeli police and intelligence services and the FBI cooperate "on a wide range of matters."

Generally, there are close U.S.-Israeli links in intelligence-gathering and sharing of counterintelligence activities. Recently, for example, security police in Caracas arrested Mahmoud Mahmoud Atta, a naturalized U.S. citizen, who was allegedly recruiting terrorists for Abu Nida' in the United States. Atta is currently being held in a federal detention center in New York, fighting extradition to Israel where he is wanted in connection with the machine-gunning of a civilian bus. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, Israeli intelligence and FBI agents worked together to help track down Atta.

U.S. government sources and analysts in Israel cite several reasons why the Israeli government might be dragging its heels on the JDL investigation. Simply put, many Israelis view Jews who kill Nazis and PLO supporters as heroes, not criminals. During a time of heightened Palestinian terrorism directed against Israelis, there would be widespread public sympathy for Jews—even those associated with Kahane—who have struck down Nazis or PLO sympathizers, which many Israelis view as one and the same. "It would be very, very controversial here to extradite young American Jews for killing Nazis," said Danny Rubinstein, veteran correspondent for the Israeli daily *Davar*.

Rubinstein noted that following the conviction of the 28-man Gush Emunim terrorist underground, who were on trial for a wave of bombings and grenade attacks against West Bank Arabs, a huge public relations campaign directed by Israel's "nationalist" camp, made up of prominent Knesset members in the Likud and religious parties, pressured the government to release the prisoners. Of the 28 who were tried, convicted, and sentenced in April 1985, 21 are already out of prison; several have prominent public positions. One of the released Gush Emunim terrorists currently directs efforts to settle Jews in the fiercely nationalist Palestinian West Bank city of Hebron. Even William Nakash, a Paris-born Jewish underworld figure convicted of killing an Arab in France before escaping to Israel, where he is battling extradition, is being supported by the religious community in Israel, including the two chief rabbis. "Jews should never be handed over to gentiles under any circumstances," said right-wing Knesset member Rabbi Eliazer Waldman, who has lobbied for both Nakash and the Gush Emunim terrorist underground.

Israel may also be concerned about not enraging New York's large, influential and wealthy right-wing Jewish community, which has been supportive of JDL vigilantism in America. As part of the FBI's probe into the JDL, agents are investigat-

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BY ROBERT I. FRIEDMAN

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 ing whether Kahane or his organization have collected money from American Jews to finance terror cells operating in America. Assemblyman Dov Hikind, who told the Voice last year that he sympathized with an American Jewish underground that murders Nazis, recently said he also sympathizes with the murder of American Arab officials or anyone else who supports the "terrorism of the PLO." Hikind, a former JDL activist and currently assemblyman from the 48th district, which has the largest Jewish population in New York State, recently hired thrice convicted JDL member Victor Vancier as a researcher on Soviet Jewish affairs. Vancier was sentenced on October 26 to 10 years in prison for six JDL bombings, including the firebombing of Avery Fisher Hall last October—just before the Moscow State Symphony was to appear. His 24-year-old colleague, Jay Cohen, committed suicide last September rather than face a lengthy prison term.

Whether Israel might be protecting the JDL because it tacitly approves of its crimes, or because it fears the negative publicity associated with noisy extradition hearings, which Kahane would surely exploit, U.S. government officials are frustrated with Israel's apparent lack of cooperation. Israeli and U.S. officials are

meeting to hash out their problems. So far, even a request by the Justice Department's International Terrorism-Middle East unit to reassign an FBI liaison to the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv has met with a lack of enthusiasm in Israel.

To be sure, Israel is not totally to blame for the FBI's failure to indict the suspects. Though government documents state the JDL is responsible for 25 recent terrorist incidents, making it one of the most active terrorist groups in America, the major 1985 bombings came at a time of relative JDL quiescence, reportedly catching the FBI without wiretaps and informants in place.

Further complicating the FBI's investigation, according to informed sources, has been the reluctance on the part of potential witnesses to testify in front of the grand jury. One reason for this reticence is the fierce devotion of many JDL members to Kahane, who has often stated that Jews should not inform on other Jews. More menacingly, according to sources familiar with the investigation, a number of grand jury witnesses allegedly have been threatened by JDL members in New York, making it hard for the FBI to persuade key witnesses to come forward.

Despite these problems, the FBI has had several major breakthroughs. The bureau has managed to penetrate at least

meeting to hash out their problems in America and Canada, and has uncovered a JDL plot to assassinate ADC founder James Abourezk last year, according to the former Senator, who says the FBI called him after foiling it. In addition, the FBI thwarted a plot by a Kach member from Israel who was in Los Angeles allegedly recruiting militant Jews to kidnap two Israeli Arab businessmen working in California. The Israeli was quietly bundled off to Israel last summer, according to law enforcement sources.

The JDL hardly compares with Abu Nidal's well-heeled international terrorist network. Headquartered in New York, the JDL has small, poorly financed chapters in only a handful of the nation's larger metropolitan centers. Nonetheless, the JDL's tactics have taken a deadly turn in recent years. Kahane himself has not only publicly cheered many of the JDL's recent bombings, but he also has called for more. In one of his weekly columns last May for the *Jewish Press*, he vowed that Kach would set up a "Mossad type unit" to assassinate perceived enemies of the Jewish people wherever they reside. "Let the Nazi groups," he wrote, "that have arisen in the United States and Canada and France and Britain and Latin America know that they are on the cross hairs of the Israeli gun."

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And though I knew—covering the fiscal crisis from my sheepishly unique perspective for the *Voice*—that white-shoe bankers would never have pulled the plug on Rockefeller and Lindsay, two of their own, as dispassionately as they did on Beame and Carey, I was not only surprised, but shaken. At the same time we'd been deriding LBJ and Nixon for going waist deep in the Big Muddy, we'd blundered into a swamp ourselves. And we hadn't even known it.

Though the effects of the fiscal crisis were in some ways physically measurable—so many miles of subway track left unrepaired, so many schools without computers or nurses—they were psychological as well. The shrinking of municipal ambition—from transformational to the merely custodial—costs. Ed Koch, uncrippled by corruption, first won the mayoralty by promising "competence." Hardly an inspiring slogan, and he couldn't even deliver that.

What we've seen in the years since Lindsay is, I think, a willingness to dodge risk by turning the city's future over to forces that stand outside its political processes, outside its citizens' control. Beame grudgingly ceded power to the bankers, Koch cheerfully gave it to developers. Both, with appropriate rhetoric about "poverty pimps," dismantled programs of empowerment. And in those few (mostly white) neighborhoods where the illusion of community control remains, it has degenerated into NIMBY. Though Beame and Koch actually did it, some of what happened is our legacy.

But not all—and not, I believe, only. So when the invitation to the reunion came, I was eager to attend. I wasn't disappointed. It felt good to gather again, in what was probably the most racially integrated room in New York, to tell war stories and laugh at ourselves! And, somewhat surprisingly for a bunch of people supposed to be going through our various midlife crises, to talk again about the politics of hope.

And though we were, undeniably, older, I'm not at all convinced we were anachronistic. It is popular nowadays—at least among those disposed to be kind to our excesses—to put both our accomplishments and our failures in a "spirit of the times" perspective, thus rendering it irrecoverable. That's false, I think. Lindsay's first-term win was an upset—a Republican winning, for the first time in more than a generation, even though the right wing of his party deserted to the Conservatives—and his second was such a fluke that the Democrats promptly changed their nominating rules.

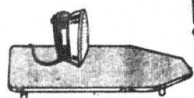
For Lindsay to have named, as his first choice, a Welfare commissioner who believed his job was to see to it that everyone who needed help actually got some was not exactly going with the flow. Pretending it was simply an excuse for going with the altogether meaner spirit of these times.

Some of the reunion's pleasures were pure nostalgia, of course, but as I wandered around talking to people I hadn't seen in years, I was reassured—and a little surprised—to discover that the basic commitment to racial and social justice wasn't stuck away in some scrapbook. If all the people in that room, including John Lindsay, were by a miracle transported back to positions of power in a 1987 government, our aims—though probably not our devious means—would be pretty much what they were twenty-odd years ago.

As I thought about this in the days after the reunion, I was chagrined that I'd felt that room's continuing commitment as a surprise, embarrassed that my own vision had been so affected by the pinched and angry "reality" exemplified by Ed Koch. Not a pretty feeling, but finally—in the recognition, through having been in that room, that the change didn't have to be permanent—an optimistic one.

We wanted to save the world. Starting in New York may not have been the smartest thing we ever did—but it surely wasn't the worst.

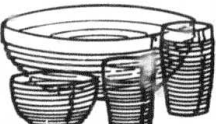
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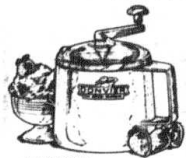
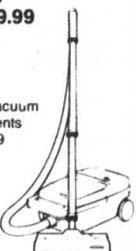


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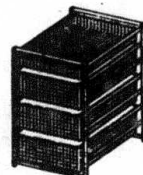
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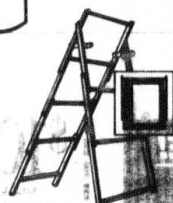


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