

Legacy of fear and hate

NEW YORK — On Monday night, a Muslim fanatic from Egypt gunned down the controversial Jewish fanatic, Rabbi Meir Kahane, here in New York. This gruesome event was replete with bitter irony.

The Egyptian, identified as one El Sayyid Nosair, had become a naturalized U.S. citizen and worked in New York, the world's largest Jewish city, repairing air conditioners. Shot by a passing policeman as he tried to escape, Nosair remains in critical condition in a New York hospital.

The Brooklyn-born Kahane became notorious in the 1960s as founder of the Jewish Defense League, which was implicated in numerous bombings and assaults. Kahane served 18 months in jail for an attempted bombing in 1968. The targets of the JDL were Soviet diplomats and anyone Kahane and his bullyboys considered enemies of the Jewish people.

After getting out of jail, Kahane renounced his U.S. citizenship, moved in 1971 to Israel, founded the extremist Kach party and was elected to parliament. Kahane gained instant and widespread support among Israeli rightists by calling Arabs "dogs" and demanding that all 2.4 million Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories be expelled. Greater Israel, insisted Rabbi Kahane, had to be a racially pure, 100% Jewish state. There was no room for anyone else.

Jews in Israel and abroad who dared suggest compromise or co-habitation with Palestinians became equal targets of the rabbi's wrath. The JDL was implicated in numerous attacks against dovish Israeli journalists and politicians whom Kahane branded "traitors." Kahane urged the "liquidation" of liberal Jews. He was denounced by the mainstream U.S. Jewish community and some Israelis even called the militant rabbi an outright Nazi.

Even so, Kahane's calls for expulsion of Palestinians to create Jewish living space and his extremist rantings were enormously popular with many Israelis. So much so that Kahane's Kach seemed poised to become Israel's third largest political party. Kahane clearly yelled what many

**ERIC
MARGOLIS**



Israelis only dared whisper. One of his favorite quips was that Israeli moderates and leftists supported the Labor Party in public but voted for him in secret.

Kahane was right. In 1988, Israel's political establishment and its powerful U.S. backers ganged up on him. A law was passed banning "racist" parties: Kahane's Kach was outlawed. Israeli rightists, led by Yitzhak Shamir's Likud Party, were petrified that Kahane would steal away their extreme right-wing support among Jews of Mideast origin. The U.S. Jewish community correctly concluded that Kahane's racist platform would discredit Israel in the eyes of the world and inevitably make it appear as a second South Africa.

Few sensible people will miss Kahane, much as they should abhor his assassination. He died in the murderous vortex of hatred that he helped to create. In fact, Kahane often predicted that he would be murdered.

Kahane may be gone, but the form of religious-racial fanaticism that he espoused is alive and well, both here in Brooklyn, a hotbed of Jewish extremism, and in Israel. Two days ago, an elderly Palestinian couple was murdered on the West Bank, apparently in retaliation for Kahane's death.

Kahane, for all his loathsomeness, at least had the guts and honesty to speak his mind and echo what many of his constituents wanted. There are a number of Israeli politicians, including members of the ruling Likud Party, who share many of Kahane's views — in private. On the Israeli right, there is a growing belief that the only solution to Israel's political, economic and social problems is the expulsion of most or even all Palestinians from Greater Israel.

The renewed violence of the Palestinian intifada and the current threat of war with Iraq have further enflamed such extreme views. At the same time, the rising wave of communal killings between Arabs and Jews and the region's growing tension have muted the voices of Israel's moderates and leftists who opposed the right wing's extremism.

In the Muslim world, there are also growing numbers of little Islamic Kahanes. These fanatics also claim that there is no room in Islamic society for 'kufirs,' or unbelievers. From the mullahs of Tehran to the shadowy Muslim Brotherhood, they are calling for total expulsion of all Jews from "occupied Palestine."

I was disgusted by Kahane's murder, much as I detested him and what he stood for. Once again, events in the Mideast are being propelled by thugs, fanatics and gunmen, instead of by clear minds. The rabbi from Flatbush leaves a fearful legacy.