

The 2005 Collapse of the Preconception regarding the Settlers' Struggle against the Disengagement Plan

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Abstract

The struggle against the implementation of the 2005 Disengagement plan did not end with settlers' violence or civil war, as some had expected. These expectations were initially based on the demonic image of the *Torani* Religious-Zionists as a fundamentalist movement. Additionally, the potential for violence originated from the immoral and anti-democratic manner, according to Prime Minister Sharon's opponents, with which he chose to promote the legislation of the Disengagement program, the humiliating and alienating way he treated the settlers, and the settlers' deep feeling of having been betrayed by the State of Israel. Most commentators and many researchers assert that violence was prevented because of the quantity and quality of the police and IDF forces that were mighty but self-controlled. However, this article offers an alternative analysis. A close look at the worldview of the *Torani* protestors and their leadership reveals the *Mamlachtic* character of their movement's faith. The reason for scarcity of violence during summer 2005 was not the power exhibited by the expulsion forces, but rather the *Mamlachtic* concept: the responsibility and religious obligation to the unity of the nation and the sanctity attributed to the continued existence of Jewish sovereignty in the State of Israel. The paper shows how decisions during protests – in particular,

at the peak of the Kfar Maimon demonstration – were made according to the *Mamlachtiut* state of mind, which was originally shaped by Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook and later by his son, Zvi Yehuda Kook, stressing above all the sanctity of the State of Israel and the unity of the nation of Israel.

Keywords: Disengagement plan, *Torani* National Religious, *Mamlachtic* worldview, potential for violence

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Introduction

One of the outstanding characteristics of the days surrounding the 2005 implementation of the Disengagement plan was fear of the expected violent reaction by the settlers to expulsion from the settlements. The head of the General Security Services (*Shin Bet*) repeatedly warned of ever increasing radicalization of the religious right, of plans to execute “show-off” terror attacks on the Temple Mount in order to incite the public and thus thwart the disengagement (Yablonka, 2005), and of plans to harm heads of state (Ben-David, Shaked, & Mei-Tal, 2005). The army and police trained for scenarios of live gunfire on troops (Rappaport, 2005). The Prime Minister warned that the populace in question had a tendency towards violence and was trying to take over the country forcibly (Kaspit, 2005). Media outlets repeatedly described the weapons arsenals in the hands of the settlers, and further warned the public of the possibility of outright civil war and of the clear and present danger that posed to the very existence of Israeli democracy (Ben-David & Yablonka, 2005). Although this fear campaign was targeted at all the “knitted skullcaps”¹ in general, there was a specific focus on the followers of Rabbi Kook² and his son Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook. In the public discourse, this group is generally called “the settlers”, and in academic literature, *Gush Emunim*.³ However, the accurate term is “the *Torani* Stream” of the Religious-Zionism movement.

At the heart of this fear campaign stood the demonic image of the *Torani* movement that had been formulated and reinforced for three decades via academic literature, nonfiction publications, and opinion pieces in print journalism and other media. According to this image, the *Torani* movement was a militantly fundamentalist movement, with an extremist, all-encompassing and uncompromising world view; a movement that was driven by divine command, unwilling to recognize the limitations of political realities (Aran, 1991; Lustick, 1993; Sprinzak, 1986), and disrespectful of law and order (Kepel, 1994; Sprinzak, 1993). It was depicted as a movement that sanctified “Greater Israel”⁴ above all other values (Friedman, 2018; Sprinzak, 1985) and that saw the secular state as

a “vessel” for fulfilling the divine commandment to settle the Land of Israel – and simultaneously as an “enemy” that must be destroyed if it does not fulfill its purpose (Demant, 1994; Feige, 2009; Taub, 2007). Finally, it was presented as a movement that sought to nullify the existing secular-democracy and to replace it with religious laws, thus turning Israel into a *Halachic State*⁵ (Feige, 2009; Weissbrod, 1985).

Based on that analysis, the majority of researchers concluded that if the government were to ever give the order to evacuate settlements, the execution would undoubtedly be accompanied by a significant and violent resistance on the part of the settlers, who would try to prevent it from happening at any cost (Armstrong, 2000; Lustick, 1993). This threatening image, which was significantly amplified during the 1990s following the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and adopted by many among the general public as well as by policy makers, dominated the public discourse surrounding the Disengagement (Kapeliouk, 1996; Karpin & Friedman, 1998; Peleg, 1997). The settlers, on their end, repeatedly claimed that even though they saw the Disengagement as an “anti-Zionist, unethical, and undemocratic” act, they remained obligated to democratic norms and had no intention of engaging in violent resistance. However, the reigning conception among the political, security, legal, academic, and media elites was that these declarations were merely lip service, and that was what eventually permeated to the public as well. In Prime Minister Sharon’s words:

On the topic of violence one doesn’t have to speak explicitly. They hint, they permit. These are people who are willing to do anything [...] There is a small group of people who are trying to lead this country to destruction. [...] There is real danger here [...] They take small, young boys and girls, and poison their souls [...] There is an effort to overthrow the government (Kaspit, 2005).

In the end, as we all know, none of these disaster scenarios came to fruition. Within six days only, the evacuation troops completed the Disengagement

mission, 25 settlements were demolished, 1,751 families were evacuated from their homes, and in contrast to all preliminary assessments, no violence erupted. How was this possible? Why did the preconception collapse? For thirty years, academic research had been claiming that the settlers were antidemocratic fundamentalists who sanctified the Land of Israel above all other values and were thus willing to use violent force in order to protect the wholeness of the land at any cost. How could it be, then, that when the State of Israel carried out a large scale unilateral withdrawal from settlements, while physically and psychologically hurting the settlers, the expected violence did not emerge? This massive gap between the theories about settlers and reality is, to my view, the central story of the Disengagement. Regarding the geopolitical and security aspects, there has been a long effort to understand why the preconception that a unilateral withdrawal would improve Israel's security and international standing utterly crashed and burned. In contrast to that, the collapse of expectations concerning the settlers' reaction to their expulsion barely received any attention. The typical explanation that is given is that the factor that prevented violence was the behavior of the expulsion forces: the power they radiated, their professionalism, and their mix of firmness with sensitivity (Harel, 2015). Author Yoram Kaniuk described it vividly:

There was not any violence, because in front of the brainwashed, zealous, mad, pseudo-Islamic extremists stood self-controlled soldiers and police (Kaniuk, 2005).

Another description from this point of view was given by author Amos Oz:

The young men and women in uniform, who decided, despite the pressures and violence [...] to stand up and defend with their own flesh the dream to be a free nation [...] are the brave defenders of the State of Israel from the unruly, raging zealousness (Oz, 2005).

There is no doubt that the behavior of the expulsion forces had an impact on the outcome and on the way the events unfolded. However, this one-sided explanation that avoids questioning the previous assumptions about the settlers – the foremost of which is that “Greater Israel” is the ultimate value in their world view, a value for which they would be willing to wage war against the State of Israel and harm IDF soldiers – is far from adequate. Firstly, because even if that explains how violence would not have prevented the Disengagement, it does not explain how there was no attempt at violent resistance. Secondly, the same behavioral pattern was exhibited by the settlers in Amona,⁶ where the troops were firm but not the least bit sensitive (Roth, 2014, pp. 450–477).

The Potential for Violence

The fact that violence did not break out is particularly surprising considering the large number of potential causes of violence which the opponents of the Disengagement had to deal with. Theories about the *Torani* movement of Religious Zionism consider an attack on the wholeness of the Land of Israel to be the central cause for violence. However, during the period leading up to the Disengagement, the potential for violence existed not only because of the attack on this central value, but also due to six other factors in the approach with which the process was carried out:

1. The shift in Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s positions, which was seen by his voters as treason.
2. The immoral and anti-democratic manner, according to his opponents, with which the Prime Minister chose to promote the legislation of the Disengagement program. Sharon’s actions included ignoring the Likud party members’ referendum; firing the National Union Party ministers in order to ensure a pro-Disengagement majority in the government; and bribing Knesset members with hefty public funds

to thwart the national referendum bill and to pass the budget – which were the final two obstacles that stood before successful conclusion of the legislation procedure.

3. The major geopolitical ramifications of the unilateral move, such as the significant strengthening of the Palestinian Hamas movement, which was recognizable months before the Disengagement.
4. The humiliating and alienating way the State treated the settlers who were about to be expelled; the utter lack of arrangements for after the Disengagement; and the settlers' understanding that despite the misrepresentation being sold to the public, they had nowhere to go the day after the Disengagement.
5. Speculations about the motivation behind the Disengagement plan – the feeling that its main aim was not to improve Israel's security but to rescue Sharon from the three police investigations he was involved in, which could have led to his resignation.
6. The media and government agencies were recruited solely to advance the Disengagement and to suppress any protest. This included delegitimizing the settlers and their struggle; highlighting the actions of extremists; ignoring or misrepresenting massive nonviolent protests; limitations on movement; police violence; stringent punishment; and violations of human and civil rights (Roth, 2014, pp. 189–267).

Hence the conditions in which the struggle against the Disengagement took place created several factors that can be considered violence inducing. These include humiliation, degradation, pain, physical and emotional injury, frustration, anger, fear, discrimination, oppression, and silencing. Any of these factors alone, and certainly the combination of all of them, should have led to a great outburst of violence, regardless of the ideological outlook of the group in question or whether or not a holy value was being disgraced. And yet, despite all that, during the entire period of the struggle against the Disengagement, there were no notable outbursts of violence. This was true even at the pinnacle of the protests – the massive

rally at Kfar Maimon and the actual days of the expulsion – where there was physical contact between police and military personnel, magnifying the potential for violent confrontation. The members of the *Torani* movement, down to all its various subdivisions, strictly and continuously insisted on a patriotic protest, one that is responsible, reserved, and not overstepping the boundaries of a legitimate and legal democratic struggle.

The reason for this was not the power exhibited by the expulsion forces, but rather the *Mamlachtic* character of the *Torani* movement's faith, which will be further described shortly: the responsibility and religious obligation they felt towards the unity of the nation of Israel and the sanctity they attributed to the continued existence of the Jewish sovereignty in Israel, the modern State of Israel.

This explanation does not jibe with the image the *Torani* movement has been given in academic literature and non-fiction publications, especially not with the fundamentalist label. According to the current academic definitions, a religious movement that sanctifies or even recognizes a secular state cannot, categorically, be deemed “fundamentalist”. Furthermore, my claim is that the threatening image of the *Torani* movement is based on a mistaken analysis of their worldview. This incorrect evaluation, common among scholars of Israel studies, stems from a tunnel vision focus on the “Greater Israel” principle, and disregards the principle of *Mamlachtiut* – that is, the sanctity of the statehood and the unity of the nation. At the very least, there is an acknowledgment of *Mamlachtiut*, coupled with a misinterpretation of its meaning or its centrality in the *Torani* philosophy.

The Fundamentals of the *Mamlachtic* Worldview

The worldview of the *Torani* movement of Religious Zionism is a *Mamlachtic* one that not only considers the Land of Israel to be sacred, but also sanctifies the unity of the Nation of Israel and its sovereignty over the land of Israel, which is embodied by the State of Israel. This worldview was formulated by Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook; after his death it was expounded upon by his

son Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, who was the rabbi for most of today's rabbinical leadership within the *Torani* movement. This study counts seven fundamentals of the *Mamlachtic* belief system: (1) the beginning of redemption; (2) activism; (3) little by little; (4) ascents and descents; (5) love of Israel; (6) the unity of the nation; (7) the holiness of the State of Israel.

1. The beginning of redemption

The base of this worldview is the eschatological outlook that sees the events of modern history as part of a divine plan, implied by biblical texts. It is rooted in the belief that the key to understanding our place in the redemption is by using the signs that were passed down by the sages in their writings. According to Jewish tradition, there is no doubt that a third redemption will come; the only question is when it will take place. The Talmud in tractate Sanhedrin 98a explains that the end of the exile will be apparent, i.e., visible to the naked eye, and that the sign is (based on Ezekiel 36:8) the ingathering of the exiles and the land of Israel ceasing to be barren. Therefore, in the early twentieth century, when Rabbi Kook contemplated the Zionist movement and saw the revival of Jewish agricultural settlement in Israel, populated by new immigrants from around the world, he had no doubt that what he was seeing was the fulfilment of the prophecies and that the redemption had arrived. In his words: "What we are seeing before us is for certain the beginning of the redemption" (Kook, 1946, p. 155).

2. Activism

Together with the feeling of certainty about the redemption coming into fruition before our very eyes, Rabbi Kook and his followers also believe that the pace of the redemption is in our hands, dependent upon our deeds. Consequently, we must not be passive and wait for the redemption to come – rather, we must do as much as we can in order to bring it. The source of this worldview is based on a novel understanding of the prophecy of Isaiah (60:22) by the Vilna Gaon (HaGra). The prophecy states: "[...] In its time, I, the lord, will hasten it". Hence, the traditional understanding, based on the Talmud (Sanhedrin 98b) maintained

that the redemption could happen in one of two ways: either “in its time” or “I will hasten it”. If the Nation of Israel does not perform the will of God, it will come “in its time” but if it repents and does right in the eyes of the Lord, the redemption will be hastened. The Vilna Gaon’s novel approach offered a third option: even if the Nation of Israel does not repent, they nonetheless have the ability to hasten the pace of redemption by gathering the exiles from the diaspora to Israel, conquering the land, building it up, and exerting sovereignty upon it.

3. Little by little

In addition to the question of when the redemption will come, there is also the issue of how it is to come about: miraculously and fast or naturally and slowly. According to Rabbi Kook’s approach, which is based on multiple sources in the bible and rabbinical texts, the third redemption will be a slow, natural process, and will proceed little by little, step by step:

Slowly slowly, Israel will be ingathered to their land, slowly slowly the land of our forefathers will be rebuilt, slowly slowly the Nation of Israel will repent and the Land will be full of the knowledge of God (Filber, 1976, p. 203).

First, the physical redemption will take place – the ingathering of the exiles and the inheritance of the land. Only afterwards will the spiritual redemption take place. Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook explained in this vein that this is why we are talking about “the days of Messiah and not the day [one day] of Messiah” (Kook, 1986, pp. 52–53)

4. Ascents and descents

As part of Rabbi Kook’s deterministic vision of the redemption, he envisioned the rebirth of the nation in its land to be like birth: it cannot be stopped in the middle. However, just like birth, it is likely to be accompanied by crises and complications, like labor pains. These are the “[labor] pains of the coming of the

Messiah", explained Rabbi Kook, "and therefore one should not be despairing or afraid" (Kook, 1920, p. 84). The sages explained that the passages in Song of Songs (2:8–9) talking about a deer "hopping over the hills" are a metaphor for the Redeemer of Israel (God). Rabbi Kook expounded that the redemptive process is always moving forward, despite its ups and downs, and that any descent is necessary for a greater ascent:

Just like a deer hopping over hills, when the Redeemer is in the valley between the hills, it may seem that it has disappeared, but this is necessary to reach the next hill [...] We can see that in the process of the rebirth of the nation and the expansion of the settling of the land of Israel there is much tumult and turmoil, ascending and descending and ascending [...] Anyone who follows the recent history of the settlement of the land can clearly see that after any descent and suffering, there was a great rise to new heights (Kook, 1946, p. 360).

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook added that: "As we progress further in the process, suffering increases. However, just as the darkness before the dawn is the thickest [...] this darkness is a preparation for the great light" (Kook, 1985, pp. 40–41).

5. Love of Israel

Based on his faith that the rebuilding of Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel is a messianic process, the first step of the redemption, Rabbi Kook ascribed religious meanings and sanctity to the actions of the secular pioneers and called upon his followers to cooperate with them. Not only did Rabbi Kook see holiness in the actions of those secular pioneers, but he even ascribed a special status for their actions to the pioneers themselves (Ben-Arzi, 2010, pp. 63–73).

In accordance with the writings of Talmud-era sages, Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi⁷ and the *Maharal*,⁸ Rabbi Kook made a clear distinction between the inherent connection to God that stems from being part of the Jewish collective and actual faith in God coupled with affirmatively fulfilling the commandments.

He distinguished between “the *segula*”, the godly nature which is imprinted upon the soul of every Jew, and inherited from generation to generation; and “the choice” that each individual practices. According to this view, God did not choose Abraham and his descendants because of particular actions – rather, he just chose. Therefore, Abraham’s descendants’ being chosen, is not dependent upon their actions. “Within every Israelite, from big to small, a Godly light burns and shines in splendid holiness” (Kook, 1920, p. 171), explained Rabbi Kook, and since the nation did not achieve this Godly nature via the choice to perform the will of God, no level of iniquity can undo it. The connection between an Israelite and God is like the connection between a father and his son. We are all God’s children, therefore he loves us even if we sin, and we are all brothers. This was Rabbi Kook’s love of Israel: absolute and unconditional, like love within a family.

Rabbi Kook had very strong words for his ultraorthodox contemporaries who did not consider the secular Zionists to be part of the Jewish collective, and he claimed that it was impossible to reach such a conclusion:

The way of truth, the way of the Torah [is] that one cannot remove sinners from the Jewish collective [...] and one who claims the opposite needs to be concerned that he does not get caught, God forbid, in the path of heresy [...] The unity of Israel, their being chosen and their holiness is something that is beyond any deed or human choice, and no sin or wrong-doing, no opinion, no idol-worship, and no heresy in the world can hurt the holiness of the unity of the nation of God (Kook, 1946, p. 59).

It is important to note in this context that the worldview that sees holiness in every Jew and that believes that the Godly *segula* is imprinted in every soul regardless of action, stands in complete contrast to the base assumptions of the fundamentalist paradigm. Not only did Rabbi Kook refuse to view the secular Zionists as an enemy that ought to be destroyed or an “other” that must be isolated, as the paradigm would suggest; on the contrary, he found them to be full of upright

values, morals, bravery, love of the land, love of the nation, and willingness to sacrifice themselves for the revival of the Jewish nation in its land (Ben-Arzi, 2010, pp. 65–73; Ravitzki, 1999, p. 237).

6. The unity of the nation

The unity of the people of Israel was a central element in Rabbi Kook's philosophy. He saw the unity of the nation as a lofty value, one that just the thought of defying could be considered idol worship. Primarily, the nation of Israel was created as "one unit in the world" (Kook, 1920, p. 38), one body with one Godly soul; therefore, just like a living body, the existence of the nation is dependent upon the wholeness of its parts.

Another rationale underlying the holiness of Jewish unity is that it is a critical condition for the redemption: the complete redemption will only come when there is perfect unity between the Torah of Israel, the Nation of Israel, and the Land of Israel, and when all three components are complete. The Nation of Israel can bring its Godly potential into fruition only in the land of Israel; the Torah can be fulfilled in its entirety only in the land of Israel, and only when the great majority of world Jewry lives there. The internal qualities of the land of Israel only come out in full when all the Jewish people are dwelling in the land and living according to the Torah.

A third explanation is that the nation of Israel is only capable of properly executing matters of state and overcoming its enemies when unified. According to Rabbi Kook, disunity inside the Jewish nation is so antithetical to Israel's nature that when it shows up it causes even the most basic semblance of sovereign existence to crumble into disarray before Israel's enemies. The classic example of this is the civil war that took place towards the end of the second temple period. Consequently, the traditional Jewish belief is that because of baseless hatred we were exiled from our land and distanced from our soil for 2000 years. Accordingly, the only way to right the wrong, the condition for getting back our sovereignty over the land of Israel, is, and must be, unconditional love.

7. The holiness of the State of Israel

Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook passed away in 1935 and did not get to see the 1948 establishment of the State of Israel. His students, led by his son, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, were the ones who actually crowned the modern State of Israel as the holy entity that Rabbi Kook the father was speaking about. The holiness of the State of Israel, as Rabbi Zvi Yehuda explained to his students, and as was formulated in the *Torani* movement worldview, was shaped by four factors. These factors were: (1) the mission of the State of Israel; (2) the centrality of the State of Israel in the redemption process; (3) the State of Israel's role in the fulfillment of the biblical commandment to settle the Land of Israel; (4) the State of Israel as a means for furthering the redemption.

1. **The mission of the State of Israel:** The state of Israel is special, because it has a mission, a purpose – to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6) – and this purpose imbues the state with an unconditional holiness, no matter what it does. Therefore, as Rabbi Kook explained:

As opposed to any other country in the world that serves as a “large, responsibility-bearing company” which aims to provide for the needs of its citizens, the State of Israel is the base of the throne of God on Earth (Kook, 1920, p. 160).

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda added: “In its very existence – its purpose. The State is the fulfillment of the word of God, the realization of the vision of the prophets in its entirety. The complications along the way change nothing” (Kook, 1986, pp. 91, 93). He therefore concluded that:

No act of desecrating the name of God on the part of the government has the ability to nullify the sanctification of the name of God inherent in the continued existence of the State.

Though we do need to criticize its flaws, we never disconnect from the State [...] because we are beholden to it due to its Godly holiness, because of the knowledge and understanding that it is an act of God (Kook, 2002, p. 81).

2. **The centrality of the State of Israel in the redemption process:** The state constitutes a central component in the redemption process – “the beginning of the flowering of our redemption”, as it is dubbed in the prayer for the welfare of the State of Israel – and thus the most significant proof that the redemption is already under way. The five books of Moses, the books of the prophets, and the Talmudic texts explicitly lay out that the first stage of redemption is the establishment of an Israelite kingdom. Rabbi Zvi Yehuda asked rhetorically what the meaning of the term “kingdom” was, and explained:

Government! Government as we see it today. Until our generation, it was unclear what these processes would look like. Now, thank God, the matter has become clear on its own, and we no longer need explanations (Kook, 1985, pp. 163–164).

3. **The State of Israel's role in the fulfillment of the biblical commandment to settle the Land of Israel:** Although every individual has an obligation to live in the Land of Israel, the core of the commandment is directed at the collective. Rabbi Zvi Yehuda asserted that “the main part of the commandment is the conquering by the state, the national and collective sovereignty over this holy territory” (Kook, 2003, p. 74); therefore, “there is an affirmative biblical commandment to establish a state” (Schwartz, 1982, p. 51).
4. **The State of Israel as a means for furthering the redemption:** The state serves as a means for ingathering of the exiles, conquering and

settling the Land of Israel, creating a model society, and developing the world of Torah studies. A strong sense of obligation to democracy stems directly from this worldview. Examining Jewish religious law, the authority to make decisions that affect collective issues and the nation's fate is in the hands of the people, and this mandate is given over to the elected leadership. Another factor that demands preserving democratic norms is government stability: undermining the governing system can destabilize the authorities and endanger the State's very existence. Therefore, its safekeeping could be considered a matter of saving the life of the nation.

The Struggle against the Disengagement

This *Mamlachtic* concept manifested itself clearly during the Disengagement period, both in the opposition strategy of the *Torani* movement and in the discourse that took place in various *Torani* forums, including educational institutions, youth movements, "Shabbat bulletins",⁹ newspapers, and websites. The members of the *Torani* movement were divided as to the preferred model of struggle, and as a result there were actually three different struggles against the Disengagement: the central opposition, the Gush-Katif¹⁰ leadership, and the *Tekuma* party. Sometimes these struggles operated individually and sometimes they acted together.

The central opposition, led by the *Yesha* Council,¹¹ was a political campaign aimed at persuading the decision makers to turn over the decision about the Disengagement Plan to an open national referendum. This struggle combined extensive fieldwork – such as billboard placement, protests, and manning intersections – which was meant to exert public pressure on the political system, with extensive lobbying within the political system (Roth, 2005, pp. 50–57).

Parallel to that, the Gush-Katif leadership ran an educational campaign aimed at raising the people's morale, igniting in them their Jewish identity and creating

a national rebellion against the Disengagement, with masses in the streets saying “no more!” (Reicher, 2010). These two struggles, even though they were aimed at different audiences, operated similarly in their public relations campaigns.

On the other end was the *Tekuma* party, whose members were part of the *Torani* movement of religious-Zionism, together with a long list of religious and secular NGOs of various types,¹² which, despite their ideological differences, shared the belief that the correct way to combat the Disengagement was non-violent civil disobedience. Due to the massive, system-wide onslaught to promote the Disengagement and suppress the resistance against it, the activists of this group lost faith in talking and explaining as means to stop the Disengagement. They concluded that the only option for hindering the government's ability to execute the Disengagement was to practice insubordination, flooding the settlements with people, and paralyzing law enforcement agencies by blocking roads all over the country.

Despite the different approaches, all the *Torani* movement members agreed that there were red lines that could not be crossed, and that despite their fundamental opposition to the Disengagement, there would be no violence, either physical or verbal, and that the situation should not dissolve into civil war. *Yesha* Council Chairman, Benzi Lieberman, clarified this agreement right at the outset of the organized struggle:

The struggle will be unyielding, but not violent. Physical or verbal violence against the expulsion forces, God forbid, is unthinkable. Civil war is total destruction, and no matter what, we must never get there (Weiss, 2004).

His colleague Pinchas Wallerstein added:

We are responsible [not only for the wholeness of the land of Israel, but also] for the Nation of Israel, and therefore even if we feel extremely betrayed, we can never break the rules (Rotenberg, 2004).

Tekuma party member, Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, stressed these points:

We must fight against this government's evil plan [...] but we must understand that our struggle is limited, because of the responsibility we have accepted upon ourselves not to aggravate the situation and not to cause civil war [...] We must find the middle path – a non-violent fierce struggle [...] If we manage to prevent the expulsion and destruction of the settlements without violence – that would be great. If we do not, we will know that we did everything we could according to the best of our understanding (Melamed, 2005).

The leaders of the struggle, the rabbis of the *Torani* movement and its teachers, repeatedly invoked these red lines at any opportunity, from the outset of the campaign and all through its duration. The issue of defining the limits of the protest reached a pinnacle in March 2005, when the political struggle in the Knesset failed – the Disengagement legislation passed, the budget was approved, and the referendum bill was rejected. As the protest inevitably took to the streets, the leaders of the *Torani* movement felt that it was only a matter of time before things got physical, so they began to take steps to insure that despite the powerful feelings of the Disengagement opponents, the red lines would not be crossed.

One of the main challenges the leaders had to deal with was the crisis of faith that the Disengagement caused among many members of the *Torani* movement. The crisis was, at least partly, a result of the following: the decision to withdraw unilaterally and to evacuate settlements, the way this decision was made, and the manner in which the whole process was promoted – particularly, the offensive way that the authorities treated the Disengagement opponents. All these factors together created a feeling that there was a huge gap between the ideals that members of the *Torani* movement studied in religious seminaries and the reality that they were now experiencing. This feeling caused many of them to challenge the *Mamlachtic* worldview (Roth, 2014, pp. 269–276).

On the ground, there was a lot of confusion “between the State of Israel as the beginning of the flowering of our redemption and the actions of the government and its agencies”, in the words of Rabbi Yossi Artziel, the secretary of the Committee of *Yesha* Rabbis (Rotenberg, 2005). Rabbi Menachem Felix said:

The actions of the government agencies caused the phrase “the beginning of the flowering of our redemption” to seem like a meaningless mantra [...] This confusion is causing some of us to oppose not only the evil actions of the government agencies, but also to renounce the State itself [...] The sharp sword drawn over the settlement enterprise threatens to undermine our entire world view (Felix, 2005).

In April 2005, about five months before the evacuation was set to begin, the leadership of the *Torani* movement began a large-scale internal persuasion effort that included an attempt to reconcile the apparent contradictions between Rabbi Kook’s vision of unity and the chaotic reality surrounding them. They strove to stabilize the weakened foundations of the *Mamlachtic* worldview and to set clear outlines for how to act in case of a real-life clash between “the Nation of Israel”, “the State of Israel”, and “the Land of Israel”. In the context of clarifying these philosophical issues, there were four fundamentals that the leadership repeatedly stressed:

1. The step-by-step, dialectic nature of the redemption process, which demands patience and nerves of steel.
2. The unconditional holiness of the State – the State of Israel is an act of God, and if its actions do not fit its long-term goal, it is only because we are only at the beginning of our path to the redemption.
3. The unity of the Nation is a holy value, and it is absolutely forbidden to disengage from the collective or from the State of Israel. The redemption is a collective process of the whole nation, and therefore any deficiencies must be fixed from within, together with the collective. The goal is to

move the existing State of Israel forward towards its ultimate goal, not to establish alternatives to it.

4. The distinction between the current government, which can and must be criticized, and the State of Israel, which is holy, and cannot be harmed or damaged in any way.

Simultaneously, the *Torani* leadership continued to clarify the red lines: no violence of any sort and no civil war. Furthermore, they stressed the obligation not to cross the boundaries of permitted democratic protest (Drukman, 2005).

In the context of the harsh unilateral withdrawal and the way that the Disengagement plan was implemented, these principals of faith became a clear indicator of the moral priorities of the *Torani* movement of religious Zionism, and of the fact that in complete contrast to their public image, the unity of the nation and the integrity of the State of Israel preceded the wholeness of the Land of Israel.

The *Mamalchitic* Worldview Tested in Kfar Maimon

The highest act, the peak of the protests, was a massive march to Gush Katif. The march was organized by the *Yesha* council, and despite the fact that many different factions disagreed with their tactics, they succeeded in uniting all of the opposition groups into one united front. All of the varied rabbinical leadership backed the march and all of the different organizations assisted. On July 4, 2005, after weeks of organizing, mental preparation, and tense waiting, the *Yesha* council declared that “the day” had come: On July 18, 2005, a massive rally would take place in Netivot,¹³ and from there the masses would march for three days to Gush Katif.

The night before the operation, the organizers met in the house of Rabbi Avraham Shapira, the most senior spiritual authority of the *Torani* movement at the time, in order to establish agreed upon boundaries for the struggle. With the backdrop of significant concerns on the part of the security establishment regarding masses of people entering the Gaza Strip, the organizers discussed the

possibility that law enforcement troops may try to stop the marchers along the way and what should be done in such a case. The majority of the *Mamlachtic* leadership agreed that in that event, the marchers should stop, sit on the ground, and not move. Regarding the question of what to do if troops try dragging people away, there was a disagreement: some thought the resistance must be entirely passive, “like a sack of potatoes”, and some thought that one could resist by shaking about, “like a fish”, though without raising one’s hand. On the other end, there were a more militant faction, consisting of Moshe Feiglin of the “Jewish Leadership” faction in the Likud Party; the secular leaders Boaz HaEtzni, Moshe Leshem, and MK Aryeh Eldad; the *Tekuma* party members; and the people from the Yitzhar settlement and “the hilltops” in Judea and Samaria. These more militant leaders thought that there was no need to worry about physical confrontation with the security forces, as long as the protesters kept themselves from using violence. Their stance was that if there was an attempt to stop the march, the marchers should keep walking forward with their hands held up. They were convinced that Rabbi Shapira would support their suggestion, just as he supported their campaign for insubordination. However, in this instance, Rabbi Shapira sided with the more moderate leadership of the *Yesha* council and the *Mamlachtic* group, ruling definitively that marching on IDF soldiers, even if one’s hands are tied, constitutes forbidden violence, and one must do all in his power to avoid confrontation with the security forces. One of his close associates asked, “What if the soldier, deep inside, wants us to push him?”¹⁴ Rabbi Shapira scolded him and ruled, “It is forbidden to push soldiers!”.

In order to ensure unity among the ranks and to maintain boundaries, Rabbi Shapira appointed a team of three rabbis, led by Rabbi Haim Drukman, to accompany the *Yesha* council during the march and to respond to any moral dilemma that might arise.¹⁵ This kind of dilemma did indeed arise.

The night before the beginning of the march, the police informed the organizers that they had rescinded the permits for the protests, including the rally in Netivot and the rest-stops along the march route. The *Yesha* council leadership could not believe what they were hearing, and decided to continue with their original plan

despite the cancelation of the permits. In response, the police tried to stop the buses that the *Yesha* Council had prepared to bring the protesters to Netivot from even leaving their original points of departure. Despite the obstacles, the opponents of the Disengagement traveled south in droves, and at the outset of the rally there were about 40,000 people present. From Netivot, the protesters traveled on foot to a spot just outside of Kfar Maimon¹⁶ to spend the night. However, when they woke up in the morning to continue their march, they discovered that they were surrounded by about 20,000 soldiers and police officers.

The *Yesha* council leadership quickly realized that the protesters were not going to be able to stand around in the sun for long, so they instructed everyone to enter the village and await further instructions. However, as the hours went by, it became clear to the leadership that under the present circumstances it was becoming unfeasible to continue the march. Kfar Maimon was encircled by seven rings of troops backed up by helicopters and aerial surveillance. The Prime Minister had given instructions to stop the protest at any cost, and the army had already taken over all the stops along the route. Essentially, even if the marchers were allowed to leave Kfar Maimon, they would have no way of reaching Gush Katif, because without the stops along the route, the trek was, for all intents and purposes, impossible for the protesters, most of whom were families with small children.

As night fell, an alternative plan began to take shape: to stay inside Kfar Maimon indefinitely until the troops got worn out. The media was already beginning to criticize the police for abandoning the rest of the country in order to stop a single protest. Officers who were yanked from their offices in Dacron uniforms were starting to break. The preparations for the actual Disengagement were on hold, and the army and police were thought to be unable to sustain such a large troop presence for an extended period of time. However, before it could come to fruition, the attrition strategy was taken off the table.

On Wednesday morning, after a day of waiting in Kfar Maimon, a representative of Kfar Maimon approached the leadership of the protesters and explained that, with all due respect to the justness of their cause, the protesters could not continue to stay inside the village. Thousands of acres of agricultural

land were being crushed under the feet of the thousands of soldiers surrounding the town; tons of harvest got stuck at roadblocks outside of town and were ruined; the local supermarket was emptied out entirely; and most importantly, the water and sewage infrastructure completely collapsed from the massive overload – consequently, there was a real danger of disease and infection. Thus, the leadership was left with two options: to break through the fences surrounding Kfar Maimon and head for Gush Katif, as the masses expected from them, or to disperse.

On July 20, 2005, at eight AM, the *Yesha* council leadership assembled the rabbis appointed by Rabbi Shapira for an emergency meeting to decide what to do. The heart supported the action of breaking through the fences – if only to fulfill the promise to the massive crowd of tens of thousands of people waiting patiently for the order to move forward. However, the intellect rejected this option outright. All of those present agreed that an attempt to break through the fences would inevitably cause physical confrontation between the protesters and security forces that could easily lead to bloodshed. The army, the police special units, and the cavalry, armed with batons, that surrounded the small village, were wound like a spring – ready to uncoil violently. The assumption was that even if the protesters moved forward with their hands tied behind their backs, within seconds the entire situation could spin out of control.

Rabbi David Dudkevich, the more militant representative among the rabbis, was of the opinion that they should breach the fences, even if it caused deaths. He claimed that this would mark the red lines for the government, which would clarify that “there is a limit to what the State can do, and beyond these limits, it cannot continue” (Noted in an interview with Dudkevich, on July 23, 2008). The rest of the leadership, who were unwilling to allow a situation that could potentially lead to civil war, opposed him. This calls for an elaboration: most of the leaders of the protest knew that the masses of protesters expected them to continue forward and to breach the fences; they also knew that they were going to pay a heavy personal price for not doing so. Notwithstanding the rage they felt about the de-legitimization campaign against them and the recruiting of the media

and government agencies to promote the Disengagement and to suppress their democratic protest against it – despite all that, they decided that under the current circumstances they were not going to break through the fences. Rabbi Reuven Netanel, the representative of Gush Katif among the rabbis, noted that:

Even during the preliminary meetings at Rabbi Shapira's house, there were those who said that if Prime Minister Sharon crosses red lines, then the Disengagement opponents should be able to do so as well. However, Rabbi Shapira did not agree [...] The decision not to use bloodshed to stop the Disengagement process was a spiritual-ethical decision that accurately reflected the feelings of the majority of the public and the majority of the rabbis (Noted in an interview with Netanel, on August 7, 2008).

Accordingly, *Yesha* Council chairman, Benzi Lieberman testified that:

There is no such thing as “at any cost”. An actual civil war is unthinkable. It takes precedent, yes, takes precedent, even to certain parts of the settlements. Civil war is a red line that shall never be crossed (Noted in an interview with Lieberman, on July 14, 2008).

Conclusion

The decision that was made at Kfar Maimon clearly and significantly reflected the *Torani* movement's worldview, their obligation to the unity of the nation of Israel and to the integrity of the State of Israel; and the responsibility they took upon themselves to prevent the situation from deteriorating into civil war. However, in the media, the decision of the protesters' leaderships not to breach the fences was often presented as submission to the power of the State. For example, Yaron London, a leading Israeli journalist, Sokolov Prize laureate for life achievement, declared:

The attempt to claim that the leaders of the *ktumim*¹⁷ did not breach the fences because they wanted to prevent a civil war is a lie. The truth is that they were not afraid of bloody confrontation, rather they understood that they were subdued [...] Do not believe what the heart wants to believe. Love did not prevail, rather the might of the government did. At this stage of the struggle for Israeli democracy, democracy overcame theocracy by the might of its muscles (London, 2005).

A similar scenario occurred during the actual evacuation. Three weeks after the Kfar Maimon rally, the evacuation of Gush Katif settlements began. The leadership of the *Torani* movement spread out through the settlements, worked among the youth, and repeated over and over again the rules of the struggle. Hanan Porat, former MK, one of the founders of Gush Emunim and perhaps the leading figure of the settlement movement, explicitly announced:

It is big *mitzvah*¹⁸ to warn each policeman and each soldier that they should not be part of this terrible crime of uprooting settlements from their land and expelling Jews from their homes. However, even if they do not listen to us, we do not have permission to exhibit even a modicum of hate towards them, because they are our brothers. That is – as a matter of fact – the depth of the term “unconditional love” in our generation, which comes as a measured response to “baseless hatred” which led to the destruction of the second Temple. This is what Rabbi A. Y. Kook wrote about in his book *The Ethics of Holiness*: And if we were demolished and our world was destroyed by baseless hatred, we will be built and the world will be rebuilt together with us by unconditional love.

Unconditional love does not mean to accept or ignore the wrongdoings of our brothers, but what we feel for them in our hearts cannot nullify the love we have for them, just like the way a father and mother continue to love their child, even if he is a “destructive son”, who fell and failed¹⁹ [...] this is the truth and nothing else: with love we will prevail (Porat, 2005).

In spite of all that, the newspaper headlines during the days of the evacuation continued to warn of the distinct possibility of civil war and the clear and present danger presented to Israel's democracy. Some of the headlines of those days, just to provide a small sample, read: "Ready for the Final Battle"; "An Atmosphere of War"; "The Danger: Live Ammunition"; "Preparing for the Worst"; and "The Fear: Live Fire on the Evacuation Troops". As is already known, after six days, twenty-five settlements were evacuated without any particular violent incident. Just like the explanations following Kfar Maimon, here too the public discourse credited the lack of violence to the behavior of the security forces.

It is the assertion of this paper, however, that the lack of violence was the fruit of significant efforts on the part of the leadership of the Disengagement opponents – first on the educational and explanatory level and then on the practical level. This was maintained by setting clear red lines for the struggle, taking responsibility for the protesters on the ground, preserving regular dialogue with the commanders of the evacuation forces, and constant keeping a presence at all the potential focal points of confrontation.

However, the main explanation why violence did not erupt was not just a particular tactical step. Rabbi Dr. Yona Goodman, the National Director of Education in the Yeshivot Bnei Akiva Educational Network in Israel and former Director General of the National Bnei Akiva movement in Israel, explained it vividly:

It is impossible to be a "bloodthirsty" group of people, and just because somebody said "listen up guys, no beating-up", everyone all of a sudden behaved. [The fact that there was no violence] is a direct consequence of our faith, of the consciousness that we were educated on, that even in the most difficult of circumstances, we remember who we are (Noted in an interview with Goodman, on January 6, 2010).

Hence, neither political tactics nor the mightiness of the evacuating forces were responsible for the fact that there was no bloodshed, but rather the school of thought

upon which the members of the *Torani* movement were raised. Most important, for that matter, was the centrality of the *Mamlachtiut* within the mindset of the *Torani* movement members – the sanctity of the State of Israel and the unity of the nation of Israel.

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Endnotes

- 1 National Religious Jews.
- 2 Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel, founder of the modern Israeli rabbinate, and spiritual father of the *Torani* religious-Zionist movement.
- 3 Literally, “the bloc of the faithful”, refers to the founding settlers’ movement.
- 4 Refers to approximate borders of Israel after the 1967 Six-Day War, not including the Sinai Peninsula.
- 5 Halachic – based on the Halacha, the religious Jewish law.
- 6 Amona is an outpost near Ofra settlement. On February 1, 2006, five months after the Disengagement, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert ordered the demolition of the nine permanent houses in the outpost, and presented it as the first step towards a larger scale withdrawal from the West Bank.
- 7 Leading medieval Spanish Jewish philosopher and poet, writer of *The Book of Kuzari*.
- 8 Rabbi Yehuda Loew ben Bezalel of Prague.

- 9 Popular weekly publications that contain news, religious articles, and political thought, which are distributed freely in religious-Zionist synagogues.
- 10 Gush-Katif is the name of the southern part of the Gaza Strip, which includes 18 settlements of the 21 located in the Gaza strip. The other three are located on the northern border of the strip.
- 11 The formal leadership and representative of the settlers, a non-profit interest group on behalf of the various municipalities in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza.
- 12 The secular groups were: Gamla Will Not Fall Again and the Nahalel Group; mixed groups were: the Orange student organization, *Matot Arim*, The National Home, Jewish Leadership, Women in Green, Professors for a Strong Israel. Religious groups were: The Campaign for the Nation and the Land led by *Chabad*, Settlers from Yitzhar (ultraorthodox religious-Zionists), and the Kach Movement (followers of the late Meir Kahane).
- 13 Netivot is a town in Southern Israel located approximately 30km from the entrance to Gush Katif.
- 14 I.e., what if the soldier wants to be forcefully, involuntarily, prevented from doing his job?
- 15 Rabbi Haim Drukman, the chairman of the Center for Bnei Akiva Yeshivot (boys' schools) and Ulpanot (girls' schools) in Israel and a central leader of *Torani* Religious-Zionism, was appointed to lead the forum. By his side was Rabbi David Dudkevich, the rabbi of the Yitzhar settlement and its Yeshiva, and the unofficial rabbi of the "hilltop youth", representing the more militant factions. On the other end was Rabbi Reuven Netanel, the Rabbi of Atzmona (a settlement in Gush Katif) representing the settlers of Gush Katif.
- 16 Kfar Maimon is a religious village in southern Israel, not far from Netivot.
- 17 The opponents of the disengagement were often called *ktumim* ("orange" in Hebrew), because orange was the color that was chosen for the struggle against the Disengagement Plan.
- 18 Good deed, commandment, divine order.
- 19 Meaning who gave in to his evil inclination and sinned.

About the Author

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