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Spring 5-2016

## **The Israeli Vagabond: An Analysis of Israel's Hilltop Youth Movement**

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## **Abstract**

Over the course of the 2015-2016 academic year, I have researched the Hilltop Youth Movement in Israel. The Hilltop Youth is a group of less than 100 individuals who live in settlements in the hills of Israel, past the allotted legal green line and instigate attacks towards Palestinians. In this project, I explain who the Hilltop Youth are and their role as spoilers for peace between Israel and Palestine in the Middle East. To do this, I researched social movements, terrorism, and gang movements to understand what category the Youth fit into and what that determination signifies for Israeli government policy.

## **Executive Summary**

In 2015, I spent my summer volunteering at a non-profit in Tel Aviv, Israel. Most of my research focused on analyzing the Israeli education system. I learned that many of Israel's problems are cyclical, that is-for every solution proposed, another problem occurs in its place. I returned to the United States curious to understand one specific sector within Israeli society its role in finding a solution for peace.

The day I boarded my plane, July 31st, 2015, an arson attack occurred on a Palestinian family. It took four months before individuals were identified in the murder of three victims in the attack. Who would do this and why? I returned to Syracuse curious to understand the various spoilers for peace within Israel. This was when I was introduced to the Hilltop Youth Movement, which is what my research for the past year has led me to understand.

The Hilltop Youth is a group of no more than 100 individuals who live in illegal settlements in the hills of Israel. They have no formalized doctrine but their attacks are targeted towards Palestinians. The attacks represent deeply rooted hatred and frustration that the vagabond members of the Youth face. They are easily condemned but minimal research has been done to understand them, which is what my project entails.

I first analyzed social movements. To do this, I found a definition to explain what makes a social movement, a social movement. Next, I looked at terrorist literature where I characterized terrorist organizations and what differentiates them from social movements. The last section of my research was defining what gangs are, how they're created, and how they operate. After I developed my definitions, I determined the Hilltop Youth best fit into a gang instead of a social movement or terrorist organization. The categorization of the Hilltop Youth as a gang led me to propose the Israeli government should respond to them as they would any other gang or violent group. I concluded by highlighting that the Hilltop Youth are a spoiler towards a peaceful resolution in the Middle East and my research works to explain the necessity for the Israeli government to control and cease the Hilltop Youth Movement.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

On July 31, 2015, headlines in Palestine and Israeli newspapers read of a horrific arson attack on a Palestinian family that killed an eighteen-month old baby. In the following weeks, both the mother and father of the boy would succumb to their injuries. In January 2016, investigations finally led to Israeli prosecutors filing murder charges against two citizens in connection with the attack: Amiram Ben Oleal and Yinon Reuveni. Reuveni was charged for violence against Palestinians and Ben Oleal was indicted as an accessory to murder as well as charged with murder on the basis of a hate crime (Williams 2016). The alleged perpetrators are among a new wave of Jewish Israeli extremists who operate illegally by settling into contested West Bank land and engaging in clashes with both the ‘mainstream’ majority of Israeli settlers, who live there, as well as Palestinian residents of the area.



Photo: Jaafar Ashtiyeh

The July attack was not the first of its kind. In fact, these strings of violent attacks notoriously called “price tag attacks” refer to a small but growing, loosely organized movement of extremist Israelis protesting the evacuation and demolition of illegal settlements in the West Bank. The list of price tag attacks range from breaking windows to cutting down and burning trees (ADL 2015). What have once been characterized as acts of vandalism, have escalated to setting fires, which have resulted in senseless murders. The July attack has outraged Israel’s leadership and society. Previous attacks have occurred whenever the Israeli government attempts to make concessions regarding settlement building in the West Bank. Their goal is clear: to make certain the Israeli government doesn’t stand in the way of the settlers. It comes as no surprise that the attack's timing perfectly aligns right before the outbreak of mass demolitions across Israel and occupied territories by Palestinians in Protest of continued settlement expansion.

One of the groups responsible for these actions is the Hilltop Youth Movement. Young ideological Israelis are motivated to settle in communities in the West Bank, which is illegal according to Israeli government. This movement, which currently has less than a hundred participants, points out a significant flaw in Israeli society. The Hilltop Youth is a group of vagabond children who live in the hills of Israel. They object to the creation of a two-state solution and oppose any allotment of rights to Palestinians. The members of this group are often young teenagers who struggle to fit into mainstream society. In any other context, the Hilltop Youth Movement would be deemed irrelevant. However, because many of Israeli’s policies over handling occupied territories are contested, the country's stakes are much higher. Any engagement Israel participates in is heavily scrutinized and because of this, Israeli government cannot afford to have its

civilians accused of attacking its neighbors because their actions lead to undermined credibility of Israel on an international level.

Research on the Hilltop Youth is a relatively new development. When they are discussed, they are either overlooked or labeled as a terrorist organization. This terminology is incorrect. Over the course of the year, my research focused on answering the following research questions: “What type of movement can the Hilltop Youth be characterized as?” and “What role does such a group have on affecting Israel’s peacemaking policy?”

I looked at the Hilltop Youth through the lens of a social movement, terrorist movement, and gang movement. I hypothesized that the Hilltop Youth mirrors the workings of a gang and should be recognized and handled accordingly. If this is correct, then the Israeli government can make efforts to eliminate their gang much like how other countries do. The start of my research looked at various definitions of social movements, terrorist movements, and gangs. From there, I determined which framework the Hilltop Youth fits into. Based on my determination, I was able to propose that the Israeli government should promote effective policies that would integrate such groups out of troubles’ way and into mainstream Israeli society. I’ve selected the Hilltop Youth as a case study because it is an example of an illegal settlement organization whose actions, while severe, are treated more significantly because they operate within a controversial society.

While this project did not examine all the factors that prevent the emergence of a just and lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace, it does argue that if groups like the Hilltop Youth can be co-opted to become stakeholders for peace, then the Israeli government

will be a more successful negotiator with the Palestinians. My year of research worked to test the above argument and offered one potentially plausible policy recommendation.

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## Chapter 2: Who are the Hilltop Youth?



Photo: Jim Hollander

The contention between Israel and Palestine originates from the beginning of the official recognition of Israel as a state in May, 1948. For the purpose of this study, my research begins with the relationship of the settlement movement after the Second Intifada.

In July 2000, President Bill Clinton, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, and PA Chairman Yasser Arafat convened at Camp David in Frederick County, MD. The intention was to negotiate a final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in accordance with the 1993 Oslo Accords (Shyovitz). Unfortunately, neither side was able to come to an agreement and the adjournment was viewed as a failure from both sides. "The breakdown of Camp David was the product of the clash between two contending logos: the Israeli expectation of Palestinian concessions on final status issues in return for greater land area, versus the Palestinian leaderships inability to concede much on final status after having conceded so much during the transitional period" (Hammami, 2001).

As a result, both leaders returned to their homeland with the same anger and resentment they had before their summer gathering. That September, Israel's Ariel Sharon, a member of Parliament, made a visit to the Temple Mount, which was interpreted by Palestinians as highly provocative. The Second (al-Aqsa) Intifada is so named because it began at the al-Aqsa Mosque in the Old City of Jerusalem (Zuhur, 2010). Following the controversial visit, protests erupted amongst Palestinian and Israeli people. In the proceeding days and months, the attacks escalated from violent protests to shootings, lynching, and airstrikes to suicide bombings and attacks in public places with Israelis. The Second Intifada lasted five years. On February 8<sup>th</sup>, an agreement was made at the Sharm el Sheikh Summit, which specified that the Palestinians would stop all acts of violence against all Israelis everywhere and in parallel, Israel will cease all its military activity against Palestinians (Aronson, 2001:145). During this period, over 360,000 Israelis lived in settlements where Israel remained in control in East Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> Delineating the concept of settlements within Israel is a complicated notion. When referring to settlements in this paper, I am referring to those which the Israeli government has determined are legal, in comparison to the Hilltop Youth which extend beyond the legal definition and therefore are both

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<sup>1</sup> The history of settlements within Israel is complex and tumultuous. Since 1948, Israel has been a participant in many wars over land disputes. Initially land conquest was not part of Israel's political agenda. Much of today's conflict between Israel and the Palestinians stems from the Six Day War of 1967. The war was fought between June 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> by Israel and its neighboring states of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria (Trueman, 2015). "In those six days, Israel's armed forces captured territory four times the size of the entire pre-1967 state. The Golan Heights, West Bank, and the Gaza Strip suddenly became the focus of worldwide attention" (Fisher, 1987). With the acquisition of this new land, the Israeli government began to create security outposts for citizens to live in. Israel subsequently effectively annexed the Golan and eastern Jerusalem, withdrew from the Sinai in accordance with a peace treaty with Egypt, and unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in 2005. The European Union and much of the international community regard all these territories (other than the Sinai peninsula) as being under Israeli military occupation.

national and internationally delineated as illegal settlements. The reason I've selected the end of the Second Intifada as the start of my research is because much of the anger and retaliatory “price tag attacks” stem from the anguish and frustration of those who lost family members in the five years of Palestinian violence. Many settlers felt their government had betrayed them by relinquishing land back to the same people who had murdered their loved ones. In order to understand why extremist organizations exist, it is necessary to understand their context. In addition, many are frustrated by the constant accusation that Israelis are occupiers of land that does not belong to them.<sup>2</sup> I believe the end of the Second Intifada was a perfect breeding ground for individuals to take action against those who wronged them, especially if they feel their government is not supporting their needs or the national interest. At the Sharm al-Sheikh Summit, Prime Minister Sharon delivered a declaration of a ceasefire with the Palestinians. In his speech he declared: "Today, in my meeting with Chairman Abbas, we agreed that all Palestinians will stop all acts of violence against all Israelis everywhere and, in parallel, Israel will cease all its military activity against all Palestinians anywhere." He also agreed to carry out a disengagement plan of settlements within Gaza (Sharon, 2005).<sup>3</sup> The settlers were

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<sup>2</sup> The scholarship of Eugene Kontrovich explained in Article 49(6) of the Fourth Geneva Convention doesn't create a “no-go zone” for the nationals of the occupying power who wish to migrate into the occupied territory. Israel has indicated willingness to trade away some of this territory, as part of a negotiated agreement—having rights and title to territory doesn't mean a state can't waive them. But until that day comes, nothing in the Geneva Convention makes it unlawful for Israeli citizens to voluntarily settle in a territory with no other legal sovereign. This logic inspires the notion that yes, Israel is an occupation but it is a lawful occupier.

<sup>3</sup> Prior to this, millions of dollars had been invested in road networks, electricity lines, water pipelines, irrigation systems, and public housing (Lesch). The settlers in those settlements were protected by the IDF and in turn, held accountable for living according to Israeli law.

outraged by such a decision and felt betrayed by their government. The community of tension and anger created the perfect environment for opposition groups to form. The Hilltop Youth is one of such groups. They are called the Hilltop Youth because they settle on empty hilltops in Judea and Samara. These settlements are considered illegal because they have not received government approval to establish themselves. Most of the communities are made of young teenagers who are under their illusion that their actions make a contribution to Israeli society. Often, they are vagabonds and students who have dropped out of school. Many of them have experienced the tumultuous time of the Second Intifada and have lived through the murder of friends and relatives by Arab terrorists. They are described as "having rejected the affluence, self-indulgence, and perverse hatred of things Jewish that has infected Israeli society, they are idealists who represent a renewed religious Zionism" (Dann, 2004). Their settlements begin as small outposts but slowly grow into full-fledged housing areas that rely on outside ministries for infrastructure.

Currently, there are only a couple hundred members of the Hilltop Youth. It is nearly impossible to count because they have no central organizing body. Each outpost may have a leader but there is no formal effort for each individual outpost to mobilize collectively. When Sharon began the evacuation of settlements in the Gaza Strip, individuals were forcibly removed from their homes. The Hilltop Youth believe they are fighting for the land that was rightfully theirs. In 2012, the National Public Radio interviewed members of the Hilltop Youth. One individual described "we see them [the Palestinians] as occupiers. They're not supposed to be there. This is our land. The ideal situation is that they should leave" (National Public Radio, 2012). These groups are

mostly comprised of adolescent males who "live in dusty blankets, study Torah and build a Jewish presence on land they believe was given to the Jews by God" (Global Post). Their extreme Zionist ideology allows them to fight relentlessly with the goal to reclaim all the land of Israel for Jews and only Jews. In fact, they have lost faith in their state and believe Israel's current leadership is creating an obstacle for God's will (Sachs 80). Their motive is clear—to stop at no cost, even if it means fighting against their own government.

The strategy for the Hilltop Youth revolves around violent acts known as "price-tag" attacks. Israeli settlers and right-wing activists, intended to pressure the government away from making concessions regarding settlement building in the West Bank, adopted the 'price-tag' policy. Attacks of the sort usually occur after the dismantling of an outpost or similar event, and are often directed at Israeli Arabs, Palestinians, and left-wing organizations (Byman, 2011). The purpose of price tag movements was to keep military too busy to disengage illegal settlements. Each time a settlement was evacuated, a subsequent attack would follow, thus putting a price on the evacuation (Byman, 2011). Such attacks range from arsons and destruction of property to cold murder. "According to UN investigations in 2011, extremist settlers launched almost 300 attacks causing over 100 Palestinian casualties and destroying 10,000 trees of Palestinian farmers (Sachs 75). Each attack sends a message, warning the government that if they want to evacuate the land, there will be retaliation. This mentality has become a way of life in the West Bank.

Almost always, the attacks target mosques, churches, Arab homes, and property and the desecration of property with anti-Arab and anti-government slogans. Two weeks after the arson that killed a toddler and his father, a Palestinian Bedouin family had their

tent set on fire in an overnight arson attack (Khadder, 2015). In July 2015, two Jewish extremists were sentenced to prison for torching a bilingual Hebrew-Arabic school in Jerusalem. In October 2015, a car was set ablaze with graffiti reading "Death to Arabs" (ADL, 2015). These are just a few examples of the ongoing attacks, which are successful in part because each time the government attempts to make concessions for peace with Palestinians, the extremists seek revenge. Authorities are alleging the hilltop youth have strategy that goes beyond their price-tag attacks. "They say this group, has drawn up a manifesto calling for a "revolt" against Israel's "wicked" secular government and its replacement with a Jewish theocracy that would bring a religious redemption (Mitnick, 2015). The Israeli government cannot focus its attention on finding a solution for peace because it becomes too preoccupied in cleaning up the damage the Hilltop Youth create. The attacks are no longer only aimed at Palestinians. The Hilltop Youth are willing to combat anyone who attempts to compromise with the Arabs.

The actions of the Hilltop Youth are in no way condoned by mainstream Israeli society, and they receive criticism from a variety of individuals. One Rabbi expressed in his personal blog his frustration with the Hilltop Youth as being labeled as proponents for religious Zionism. He says "it is ironic that accusers of the Hilltop Youth have attached them to Religious Zionism because of only one indicator: they live in the settlements. It is as if the detractors have reduced Religious Zionism to that one dimension. He goes on to explain Zionism does not endorse committing crimes and opposing the State for the name of Israel and explains the Hilltop Youth do not exemplify the same morals and ideals Zionism expresses (Pruzansky 2016). This Rabbi is not alone in his condemnation of the Hilltop Youth's lifestyle. Rabbis for Human Rights is an example of an organization,

which has served to counter the Youth's actions.

Rabbis for Human Rights was founded in 1988. It is the only rabbinic voice in Israel that is explicitly dedicated to human rights (RHR). It derives its authority from both Jewish tradition and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and it is not affiliated with a specific political party. Members include approximately 100 rabbis from various streams of Judaism, with some full and part time staff members (Ascherman). Their mission is to inform Israeli public about human rights violations and to press the state institutions to redress these injustices that have been done. They believe it is their responsibility to hold their government accountable for allowing its citizens to continue to engage in activity that harms the peace process. Many of their projects are centered upon repairing damage that individuals from the Hilltop Youth have committed. For example, they run an Olive Tree Campaign, which works year round with Palestinian farmers from dozens of villages in the occupied territories to ensure they can access their lands that are often denied to them because of their proximity to Israeli settlements (RHR). Many of the actions committed by the Hilltop Youth include the burning of Palestinian agriculture, and this organization works to make sure these individuals can have their land fairly protected. Rabbi's for Human Rights does support Zionism however it understands that civilians cannot be treated unjustly in the name of Zionism. The organization also works to lobby the government on cases relating to unfair land confiscation on the part of illegal settlers. Their website also keeps up-to-date information about when attacks have occurred and condemns each of them. Rabbi's for Human Rights represents an in-state NGO that directly voices its concern of the actions of the Hilltop Youth and also the lack of action taken by the Israeli government for

holding them accountable.

Another example of Israeli's response to the Youth's attacks is an organization called "'Tag Meir" or "Light Tag" which was coined in response to "Tag Mechir" meaning "Price tag". The organization is a coalition of over fifty organizations within Israel. Their mission statement explains "a majority of Israelis oppose acts of violence against innocent people who are being used as pawns in a political fight that has little or nothing to do with them. This organization gives Israelis the right to voice their opposition". Light tag works to offer material support to victims of attacks, apologize to leaders and residents of attacked areas, and to organize protest against the individuals instilling the harm. Shortly after the Duma attacks in July 2015, 1,000 Israelis under Tag Meir raised nearly 200,000 NIS for the sole survivor of the arson. Tag Meir Chair Gadi Gvanyahu said: "A broad mobilization of the Israeli public will send the Dawabsheh family, and other minorities living among us, a message of reform, solidarity, shared destiny, and compassion in the spirit of the Torah of Israel, the commandment to 'love him as yourself' (NIF 2015). Tag Meir continues to fight relentlessly for justice for the victims of the price tag attacks and proudly gives individuals the opportunity to express to those committing the crimes, as well as the Israeli government, to put an end to the atrocities that continue to occur. The above are just a few examples of dozens of more organizations that demonstrate that the Hilltop Youth are ostracized by the community they attempt to operate in. Whether it is in political speeches, private grievances, or through organizational campaigns, the Hilltop Youth are fully recognized as problematic by Israeli citizens.



### **Chapter 3: Social Movements**

The Hilltop Youth have an impact in the areas where they live. Their acts of vandalism attempt to coerce the government into creating policies that hinder the peace process within the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The term "social movement" has been characterized in numerous ways. In order to proceed with who the Hilltop Youth are, it is necessary to define what a social movement is to determine if they fit into the appropriate framework to be categorized as a social movement. It is necessary to establish that the Hilltop Youth will be looked at through the lens of a social movement as defined by American politics. If they are recognized as a social movement, there are certain implications about what role they play in society. Social movements are important because when they are formally recognized, they take on an enormous political capability to express grievances of groups of individuals. Social movements have shaped politics for centuries. Here in the United States, movements such as LGBT movements, Occupy Wall Street, and Pro-Choice movements have used their power as recognized movements to lobby, protest, and work with the government to create policies that work in their favor. If the Hilltop Youth are entered into the same category, they have the ability to make the same contributions.

Dozens of scholars have varying definitions about what constitutes a social movement. Gundelach defines social movements as an organizational field, which creates a loosely knit network of groups and organizations, which have a project of societal change in common. The groups and organizations are entirely dependent upon the activity of their supporters (Gundelach). Alain Touraine expresses that social movements are a special type of conflict. "A conflict presupposes a clear definition of opponents or

competing actors and of the resources they are fighting for or negotiating to take control of “(Touraine, 1985). In the book, "Dynamics of Contention", Douglas McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly collaborated together to create a working definition of what a social movement is. They determined that social movements fall under a broad category called contentious politics. Contentious politics are divided into two broad subcategories:

Contained contention means at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims or a party to the claims, the claims would if realized affect the interests of at least one of the claimants and all parties to the conflict were previously established as constituted political actors.

Transgressive contention is episodic, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims or a party to the claims, the claims would if realized affect the interests of at least one of the claimants, at least some parties to the conflict are newly self-identified political actors and at least some parties employ innovative collective action. (Tilly, 2001)

Contentious politics can either remain as contentious politics or eventually evolve into a recognized social movement. For this to be accomplished, they must have four necessary features, which are: organization, mobilization, opportunity, and collective action itself. These features will be examined later in this paper. "It is only by sustaining collective action against antagonists that a contentious episode becomes a social movement.

Common purposes, collective identities and identifiable challenge help movements to do this but unless they can maintain their challenge, movements will evaporate into the kind of individualist resentment called resistance” (Tarrow, 1998). Each of the above definitions is relevant because they create a fluid definition of what a social movement is.

Now that there’s a framework defining a social movement, the Hilltop Youth can be explained and interpreted through a lens, which can then determine if they properly represent what a social movement, is. Does the Hilltop Youth have the necessary

organization and mobilization to be considered a social movement? Perhaps calling them a social movement is an overstatement. However, at this time it is too early to determine what category the group fits into. The proceeding sections will look to define both terrorist organizations and gang movements.

## Chapter 4: Defining Terrorism

The day after the Duma atrocity, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu released a statement admonishing the attacks. "I am shocked by this terrible criminal act," he said. "This is a terror attack. Israel deals harshly with terrorism, no matter who the perpetrators are. The government is united in its opposition to terrible heinous acts such as this one" (Jerusalem Post, 2015). Immediately following, both local and international newspapers flashed headlines exclaiming "The New Jewish Terrorist" and "Israel Faces a New Brand of Terrorism, this time from Young Settlers". Are these statements true? Are the Hilltop Youth truly capable of carrying out terror attacks to the level of being formally recognized as a terror organization? This section seeks to answer, what terrorism is and what it means to call an act, one of terrorism.

There are over 200 working definitions of terrorism and because of this there is no definition that is universally agreed upon<sup>4</sup> (Matusitz, 2013). There are three common elements amongst countries with definitions of terrorism which are 1) the use of violence 2) having a political objective and 3) the attack's aim is to propagate fear in a target population (Matusitz, 2013). What makes a terror attack so profound is that its impact expands beyond its immediate victims; they are directed at society as a whole. A study by Leonard Weinberg and William L. Eubank highlights that publicity and psychology are at the heart of terrorism. Victims are central to an attack being well executed because the purpose is to illicit enough fear that expands to an audience beyond those who are directly attacked. Terrorists want the public to feel a profound sense of fear and be angry

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<sup>4</sup> Professor Boaz Ganor defines terrorism as the intentional use of, or agreement to use, violence against civilians or against civilian targets in order to attain political aims (Ganor 2010).

with their government for not being able to defend its citizens from the attack. Their purpose is to leave people with the impression that an attack can happen at any time. Attacks are premeditated with the intention of leaving a message to the world that no one is safe. Attacks are also a call for attention. The opportunity to gain mass media attention to share their message of hatred and doom to the world is a key component of terrorist ideology. They thrive off of the prospect of achieving their political goals through fear. By staging the attack, the attackers believe their views will be advanced. In most cases, the victims are perfect strangers with whom perpetrators have had no previous contact. A group with a political agenda capitalizes on the ability to publicize their actions and creating a fear that will leave leaders with no choice but to make concessions to their demands. Regardless of how many definitions there are of what terrorism is, political motivation and civilian victims are its most definitive features.

When an attack occurs, it doesn't take long for the media to determine if the act was one of terror, this is usually determined by what method was used to cause casualties. Typical expressions of terrorist violence include indiscriminate bombings, armed assaults on civilians, focused assassinations, kidnappings, hostage taking, and hijacking, which are all considered criminal offenses by national or international laws (Schmid 2004). Any crime has a fear component to it but that does not necessarily mean it is one out of terror.

Political motivation and civilian targets are qualifying components of terrorism, both of which are features of the actions the Hilltop Youth have partaken in. Many of the Hilltop Youth feel they are freedom fighters; others have nothing else to do and partake in their crimes to fill their time. Just because a group engages in an attack that has

terroristic components does not necessarily mean the group can be categorized as a terror group. I will discuss this more in depth later; the crimes the Hilltop Youth have committed are in no way to be condoned. However, to call them a terrorist organization is an overstatement because they do not properly belong in the same category as a formalized terror campaign.

## Chapter 5: Gang Movements:

In order to best understand the Hilltop Youth, I've chosen to deliver their description in a manner that speaks to those attempting to understand the Hilltop Youth from an outsider's perspective. I've selected this view because the scrutiny of the Hilltop Youth is derived from outside media portrayal of their actions. As previously described, when the youth aren't overlooked, critics label them as a terrorist organization.

I hypothesize the Hilltop Youth could be compared to a gang. While gangs are an international phenomenon, the way they are categorized and handled is dependent on the laws of a nation. I've utilized the US definition of a gang because we are an ally of Israel and therefore it would be reasonable to assume that if it was determined the Hilltop Youth should be handled as a gang would, American diplomats would make recommendations based on their standards and definitions.

The United States Department of Justice has developed a federal definition of a gang. Gangs have various components, which include:

- an association of three or more individuals
- members who collectively identify themselves by adopting a group identity which they use to create an atmosphere of fear or intimidation
- their purpose is to engage in criminal activity and which uses violence or intimidation to further its criminal objectives
- the members intent is to enhance or preserve the association's power, reputation, or economic resources

\*Taken from US Department of Justice\*

Gangs also have other features, which are not part of the legal definition, which Scott Decker discusses in his piece "Collective, and Normative Features of Gang Violence". He explains violence is integral to the life of a gang and their ability to create dread is what sets them apart. Gangs can often be established along ethnic lines but it is territorial

concerns, which guide their formation. This explains why gangs usually claim turf as their own and are committed to its "defense". Outsiders or anyone invading their turf is likely to evoke a violent response. Common characteristics of gangs include intimidation, vandalism, theft, assault, stabbings, shootings, and sometimes murder. Violence occurs in gangs as an attempt to enact private justice for wrongs committed against a gang (Decker, 1996). Many of the aspects of gangs in the United States mirror the operations of the Hilltop Youth.

Although there is no formalized description of how the Hilltop Youth are recruited, I can utilize knowledge on how other gangs enlist their members to determine how the Hilltop Youth join their movement. Gang members are notably youths between the ages of 12-25. Coincidentally, the approximate age range of the Hilltop Youth is 15-25. There are many reasons why an individual may opt to pursue a gang. According to the Los Angeles Police Department some of these reasons include the need for food or money, a sense of family, desire for protection, peer pressure, and the sheer excitement of being a part of something bigger than themselves. Youth gangs often arise during times of rapid social change and political instability.

Few youths are able to recognize the hazards associated with gang involvement. The decision to join a gang is a conscious decision an individual makes which multiple personnel and environmental factors influence. The dynamics of gang formation are complex and have been studied by countless researchers from psychological, sociological, and criminological perspectives. It is presumed by gang researchers that gangs grow out of conflicts among groups of young adolescents and conflicts with the law-abiding community. Alienation from key socializing institutions such as family and

schools also create necessary communities for gangs to form (Howell, 2010). Researchers observe that the gang-joining process is similar to the manner in which people would go about joining an organization. There are many steps in recruiting members to join a specific gang which are explained by James Densley. He explains gang membership is reliant on familiarity and conformity. Gang members only extend their confidence to a narrow set of in-groups such as family and friends; this is why gang recruitment occurs in local settings where people already know one another. Gangs must determine whether potential admits are capable of performing the violence that is required of them. Gangs recruit individuals who have a criminal reputation and are also good fighters. Individuals must also be tested for loyalty to see if their values and abilities are capable of conforming into the groupthink of the gang. Loyalty and criminal competency are the most sought-out characteristics of potential gang members. Through this secretive and highly selective recruitment process, gang members are able to have their pick on which people will best carry out the motives of their group. Once a gang is assembled they are able to fulfill the crimes they were recruited to execute. The creation of the Hilltop Youth follows many of the above steps and their performances almost exactly mirror the functionality of a gang.

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## Chapter 6: Where do the Hilltop Youth fit?

By this point in my research, I have briefly examined social movements, terrorist organizations, and gangs. Each category has its own unique framework that conceptualizes each group which falls into their given category. With the information I've compiled, I can now determine where the Hilltop Youth belong.

Movements such as Black Lives Matter, Women's Suffrage, and the Global Justice movement are well established, publically funded organizations that have nothing in common with the Hilltop Youth. The above are all prominent social movements that have had an incredible ability to instigate social change. Those movements have changed the way policy makers have made their future decisions and policies to be made in the groups' favor. Recognized social movements have profound features, which properly exemplify them as defenders of the social movement definition. In the beginning of my research, I used various scholars to formulate a definition of what a social movement is.

For this section, a concrete definition is not necessary to articulate the flaws in the Hilltop Youth that remove it from being labeled as a social movement. Gudelach explains the centrality of social movements is based on the activity of their supporters. Social movements must have a solid grounding within society for them to be recognized, supported, and for changes to be executed. Almost all of the Hilltop Youth's actions are criminal; there is no focus on creating a vast group of outside support because they operate amongst themselves. The Hilltop Youth are outcasts whose activity is meant to be provocative towards the Israeli government, not in creating a mass support group from Israeli society. Touraine cites that social movements have a clear definition of opponents. As demonstrated by the price-tag attacks, the opponents are not necessarily easy to

identify. While it may be easy to say Palestinians are their direct targets of opposition, the incentive behind the price tags are to coerce the government into supporting the extremist side instead of helping to find a solution to peace. The Hilltop Youth make the Israeli government their enemy just as much as the Palestinian's. Paul Wilkinson and Charles Tilly both describe social movements as having at least some degree of organization. It's unclear how precisely the Hilltop Youth are put together. While there may be some degree of hierarchy, the acts are carried out voluntarily by individuals who live in their own illegal encampments with little to no communication with other members of this vagabond tribe.

Most significantly, Charles Tilly, an expert in social movement studies, states four defining features of a social movement: organization, mobilization, opportunity, and collective action. Not only is the Hilltop Youth loosely organized, they also have limited mobilization. Tilly's definition of mobilization is a process by which a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for actions. These resources may include labor, power, goods, weapons, and votes. All of these are usable in acting on shared interests. There are various components that movements could have that would measure their mobilizing capability, which includes members identifying themselves as a group, the group having a standard name known to both members and nonmembers, the members appearing in public as a group identified by their name, having standard identifying marks, and having a common store of resources. The Hilltop Youth have none of those mobilizing features. Their name isn't one that's formally recognized by themselves or by other people. They are only called the Hilltop Youth because they live in illegal outposts on the top of Hills. The Hilltop Youth are not unified in their actions,

neither by their name or markings. It is highly unlikely when they are arrested, they claim their loyalty to a specific movement at all. Their exploits are too individualistic to have any mobilizing affect. A social movement must also have the ability to capitalize on opportunity, which concerns the relationship between a group and the world around it. Again, the Hilltop Youth have limited methodology within their attacks; they do not wait for a specific time period to unleash their attacks. Their opportunity comes often when the Israeli government dismembers a settlement and the Hilltop Youth attack. While that could seem to be the opportunity Tilly is suggesting, the Hilltop Youth is far too immature to be strategic to develop an understanding to its relationship in finding specific opportunities.

Finally, Tilly talks about collective action being the essential root that transforms actions into a social movement. Collective action is people acting together in pursuit of common interests. Minimal detail needs to be described in order to exacerbate the image that the Hilltop Youth are not a unified brand and that there is no motive for there to be a common interest at stake. The Hilltop Youth are angry individuals who unleash their wrath on a variety of targets out of hatred, not because they have a cause, which brings them together to instill change.

All of the above points demonstrate how impossible it is to compare the Hilltop Youth to a social movement. The Hilltop Youth is incapable of fulfilling any of the requirements that would loosely define it as one. Social movements are progressive, organized, and capitalize on opportunity. Instead, a group of mischievous youth who attack innocent people are more likely to fit into the other categories I've researched which are terrorist organizations or gangs. Differentiating between terrorist organizations

and gangs can be a challenging task. Both engage in criminal activities with the intent of harming others. Many of the Hilltop Youth's actions have been terroristic in nature but that does not mean they properly fit into the realm of a terrorist group.

Pan American Flight 103 was on a routine transatlantic flight when it blew up over Lockerbie Scotland on December 21st 1988, an attack instigated by the Libyan government where all 243 passengers and crew were killed. The story of September 11th changed perspectives on terrorism forever. Former President Bush dictated in his speech to the nation:

Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts...Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror. The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, and huge -- huge structures collapsing have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat.

In March 2016, Istanbul headlines read of the violent strings of terror attacks throughout Turkey. All of the above attacks were pre-meditated, and well calculated with the intent of harming as many innocent victims as possible through the implementation of terror. These attacks are timeless and the individuals who experience them either first hand or through media will never be able to shake the gruesome imagery and constant threat of fear that looms over their head after an attack. Daily lives are shattered as people become fearsome of going into public places. Security levels are raised to an all-time high and armies are on guard, ready to retaliate from terrorist's actions, ready to fight the groups that caused such horror to occur. The US Department of State has listed dozens of designated foreign terrorist organizations which include ISIS, Al Qaeda, and Boko Haram, to name a few. Almost any informed individual would be able to name at least

one attack initiated by these groups. These recognized terror organizations are on a watch list because they have a clear doctrine, which involves harming individuals who do not support their cause. They have organized leadership and the purpose of their attacks is to gain international media attention. What differentiates these terror organizations from the Hilltop Youth, is that neither their characteristics nor motivations are equivalent to the capabilities of the Hilltop Youth.

The individuals who partake in attacks by the Hilltop Youth are criminals and should absolutely be held accountable for their actions, but to call them terrorists is an overstatement. Defining features of terrorism include an attack that is intended to create fear, draw media attention, and often has a political motive. Based on these standards, the Hilltop Youth have committed terror acts. However, understanding the motivation behind the acts is a necessary component to debunking whether a group is one of terror.

To begin, a terror attack creates fear. However, any criminal activity involving the harm of an individual is going to illicit fear. The Hilltop Youth's attacks are not any more severe. It may be possible that Palestinians are fearful for their land being destroyed and they never know when an attack is going to occur. However, citizens do not live their daily lives with the expectation that the Hilltop Youth are going to harm them. The Youth are not a household name outside of the areas where altercations occur in Palestine or anywhere else as a result of their attacks. Terrorist groups mass produce fear for everyone. In the cases of the Hilltop Youth, the intended victims are localized to Palestinians and communities surrounding the Hilltop Youths' claimed land. Unlike 9/11, where over 3,000 random individuals were murdered, the Hilltop Youth strategically targets their attacks on Palestinian property. As I discussed earlier, defining terrorism is

about perception. The Hilltop Youth are Israeli extremists who see all Palestinians as potential enemies and combatants; they believe they are in a war against them. These Youth are angry and hurt which is why they name their outposts after family members who have been killed as a result of attacks on Israelis. For example, Givat Oz Gaon was an outpost created after three teenagers were murdered and kidnapped by Hamas in June 2014 (Times of Israel, 2014). Another outpost, Givat Assaf was destroyed by Israeli government in 2014, which provoked retaliation. The settlement was in honor of Givat Assaf Hershkowitza father of two children, who was killed by a Palestinian terrorist in a drive-by shooting (Jerusalem Post, 2015) These extremists view these attacks as retribution and justice even if it goes against their government's wishes. The Jews who live in the West Bank live with the consistent threat of Hamas, an actual terrorist organization from Palestine. For these people, attacks are imminent each day. To the Hilltop Youth, their actions are not to create a widespread panic; they are to retaliate against the hurt that has been brought among them.

Next, a terror attack is utilized to receive mass media attention. An attack of any kind is going to get some type of attention. I do not believe the Hilltop Youth is developed enough to have a mentality that creates attacks to give a message to the world spreading hatred and fear. The Hilltop Youth are incredibly disorganized. They are too small and unstable to raise money, recruit, train, establish contact for help, gain resources, and choose targets for maximum impact that a real terrorist organization would be able to. Their lack of organization also corresponds with their disability to develop an attack that would get the attention they need if that's what their goal was. The Duma attack in summer 2015 was one of their more popularized crimes, however they received

media attention because nothing has been done to stop them, not because their tactics are increasing. All of the attention they receive is negative attention disapproving of their actions. My research has presented no sources that encourage the actions of the Hilltop Youth. They are almost entirely disregarded: even the settler community they claim to belong to does not take responsibility for their actions. There is no support from larger society, unlike terrorists who have enough public support to be harbored through underground networks. As previously expressed in my research, there are many organizations both in and out of Israel that have vehemently expressed their condemnation of the Hilltop Youth.

Political motivation is another necessary determinant for a group to be a terror organization. This is the hardest feature to define for the Hilltop Youth. As previously stated, Israel is in a war and many of its citizens feel threatened by its surrounding neighbors who do not support the State of Israel and see it as their enemy. This mentality is not unique to the Hilltop Youth, however their extremism is what makes them stand out. Their lack of a doctrine makes it unclear what their motives are, if any. That said, there is no defined political motivation behind their attacks. It is true that the price tag attacks are utilized as a tactic to distract the government from making concessions that could result in peaceful relations with Palestinians, which is why it is arguable that there is a political incentive behind their attacks. If anything, the attacks are an annoyance and a burden to the Israeli government; they've become a problem because their government has done nothing to quell their illegal activities. The Hilltop Youth have no communication with the government. No one has sent any letters to officials or spoken out creating a political platform, which explicitly states what their intentions are. The

members are young individuals who have no productive role in society. Most of them are not educated enough to understand how to communicate effectively if they were to convey a political ideology to any government. They have crossed lines by taking offensive matters into their hands on occasion, but it seems there is no tactical political motivation behind their attacks.

The Hilltop Youth attacks have, at times crossed into a blurred line of what could be called a terror attack. Participants of violent actions should be treated as criminals and those whom they have harmed deserve to have justice brought to them. There is no excuse for the activities the Hilltop Youth engage in. However they also lack political motivation, resources to get media attention, and their crimes are not violent in a way that would create widespread fear that extends beyond perceived enemies of the Youth. This claim is in no way attempting to condone the Hilltop Youth, but it is irrational to put them on the same spectrum as a well-developed, notorious terror organization.

It has been established that the Hilltop Youth are not a terror organization or a social movement, which leads us to our last framework, looking at the group as a gang. The Hilltop Youth's actions emulate the exact definition of what a gang is. There are various components within the US Department of Justice definition of a gang that accurately categorize the actions of the Hilltop Youth. First, a gang is an association of three or more individuals; the Hilltop Youth are few in number, no more than a hundred. Next, the group's identity is based off an atmosphere of fear or intimidation. The tactics behind the Hilltop Youth are to create fear for their perceived Palestinian enemies and to intimidate the Israeli government out of dismantling settlements through the prominence of "price-tag" attacks. Lastly, to be considered a gang, group members must engage in

criminal activity that uses violence. Almost all of the Hilltop Youth's attacks are violent to some degree, which have included throwing rocks at Palestinian pedestrians and various arson attacks on Palestinian property.

Outside of the US definition of a gang, I cited characteristics that Scott Decker utilized to define a gang; many of these are pertinent to the Hilltop Youth. He explained gang members are between the ages of twelve and twenty-five which is the precise age range of the Hilltop Youth. Many gang members join a gang to gain protection, have a sense of family, and for the sheer excitement of being a part of something. An Israeli journalist described the Youth as "confused youths who have lost touch with traditional hierarchy. They don't listen to their parents and they have no rabbis. They create their own ideology and consider the State of Israel to be the enemy" (Caspit, 2015). Many of these children have left their homes and families all together. Their viewpoints are so extreme, the only community they have is amongst other children who choose to live the same vagabond lifestyle. Most of them don't attend school and therefore instead of receiving a proper education, their sense of belonging comes from their belief they are fighting a just cause. Members of the Hilltop Youth are fiercely loyal to one another. After the Duma attacks, they refused to answer questions from authorities. "They know how to fudge evidence, no matter how harsh the interrogation is, they will never say a word, they will never betray their friends...They don't evoke any fear or respect when arrested" (Caspit, 2015). Many of them boast their pride of belonging to a rebel group. The Hilltop Youth are sadly mistaken that their actions have created change and have rallied support. This is similar to a gang mentality. In order to continue justifying their actions, they must believe what they're doing has a purpose. Gangs operate outside of

their given judicial system and demonstrate blatant disregard for the law and its constituents. The Hilltop Youth are underage criminals who follow a radical messianic ideology without any parental figures; Israeli law means nothing to them. The Hilltop Youth, much like other gangs, operates outside of sociological norms that involve members cutting themselves off from the rest of society. In addition, according to Decker, conflict is a breeding ground for gang formation because members are able to unify through their shared emotional distress. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict highlights a perfect setting where tired, angry, and frustrated individuals can come together to radicalize themselves and take matters into their own hand. Gang mentality permits a separate belief system, which strays from normalcy. Gangs represent a group of outcasts, which is what the Hilltop Youth are. They're merely a group of angry, distressed children who lack a sense of purpose in life and create a headache for the Israeli government.

The above are just a few components, which explain how the workings of the Hilltop Youth exemplify the exact definition of what a gang is. Calling them a gang does not undermine the severity of their criminal acts; gangs are problematic and must be handled accordingly. Titling them as a gang makes it easier to understand what tactics are utilized to maintain their group and also make it plausible to properly create policy, which will alleviate the problems groups, such as the Hilltop Youth, create.

In this section, I have explained why the Hilltop Youth do not fit into the framework of a social movement or a terrorist organization and why calling them a gang is the most proper category for them. This claim is important to understand because it holds tremendous implications for understanding the role of the Hilltop Youth, both in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and towards the rest of the world.



## **Chapter 7: Spoilers for Peace:**

Until now, the Hilltop Youth have previously been overlooked or improperly categorized. The purpose of reducing the Hilltop Youth to a gang movement instead of a terrorist group is because it helps to reduce international pressure. A state faces severe international repercussions when it is accused of having an unsolved terror problem. In comparison with other states, Israel's policies are more closely monitored, and at times contested. The politics surrounding Israel are complex and each day, Israeli citizens, outside policy makers and media outlets, heavily scrutinize the policies the government implements. International media has a profound effect on gaining support (or lack thereof) for the State. If Israel is accused by the media of having an uncontrolled terrorist group, then it will lose much of its credibility in its abilities to handle problematic citizens. Some stereotypes of Israel include the government breeding militaristic individuals whose sole purpose is to attack Palestinians. The existence of the Hilltop Youth, especially if they are called a terrorist organization confirms this stereotype. These negative depictions exploit the State and in turn, Israel is constantly criticized for its "apparent" incompetence in properly punishing individuals who commit harm. It is easy for harmful accusations to be made by outsiders about Israeli policy when its powerful government cannot control a group of wayward kids while trying to handle peace negotiations.

While there are numerous reasons for why an individual may not support the state, the significance is that any lack of support can have the potential to damage the prospect towards a peaceful solution. This is because Israel faces a critical international audience that is unsympathetic to negotiations with a state that supposedly encourages the

breaching of international laws and does not follow in accordance to set morals. By labeling the Hilltop Youth as a gang, not only is the severity of their existence reduced, but it also returns credibility to Israeli society and the Israeli government. Gangs are a problem and their actions should not be taken lightly. A valid criticism for Israeli government is that they have not done enough to dismantle the inner workings of the Hilltop Youth and have failed to bring justice to individuals in a timely manner. However, the Israeli government can no way be accused of having terrorist organizations running rampant in their country, and if they do, the Hilltop Youth is not one of those groups.

Since the Hilltop Youth have been categorized as a gang, policy should be implemented in the same manner that any other state would work to eliminate their gang issues. This includes suggestions such as implementing social integration programs that target troubled youth or cracking down and strictly enforcing laws against civilian violence. If such policies are successfully implemented, then Israel will be able to avoid headlines, which attempt to discredit the capabilities of the state to monitor its rebellious citizens. Not only must the Israeli government enact policy, but it must also work to ensure that when an attack does occur, investigations and arrests are made promptly to avoid claims that the government does not care about its issues and is unwilling to make necessary concessions. Improvements in this realm can have the potential to help prospects for a peaceful solution by demonstrating to the Palestinian authority that Israel is genuinely committed to generating peace and is willing to punish its own civilians for any violence perpetrated. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is undoubtedly perplexing. There is no clear-cut way to create peace. No matter what stance is taken, individuals are

going to be upset and some, such as the Hilltop Youth may feel the need to retaliate. One complexity of the Conflict is that there are dozens of problems and the "Conflict" is just an umbrella term.

At this point in time, it's unclear if a two-state solution or any solution can be made between Israel and Palestine. However, any attempt to make positive changes by reducing violence is a step in the right direction. While the Hilltop Youth are not a terror organization, they are a problematic fringe gang that damages the reputation of their state. Regardless of what the intentions for the Hilltop Youth are amongst themselves, it is the responsibility of the Israeli government to recognize these youth as a problem and to do everything in their power to ensure that action is taken to put an end to their destruction.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion:**

Nine months ago, an innocent Palestinian family was murdered because of an unprecedented arson attack. The individuals harmed were a part of a large collection of victims to spiteful price tag attacks. The ragged children who make up the Hilltop Youth settle in outposts extending beyond the legal barriers of the State of Israel. While some members believe they are fighting for their religion and homeland, others are desperate for purpose and attack in the name of hatred. However, it is not the Hilltop Youth who suffer the consequences of their actions. Instead, representatives of the Israeli government are forced to take responsibility for the problems these spoilers create.

My year of research has looked into who the Hilltop Youth are in depth. I sought to answer the following research questions: “What type of movement can the Hilltop Youth be characterized as? and “what role does such a group have on affecting Israel’s peacemaking policy?” To answer the first, I created definitions for social movements, terrorist organizations, and gangs. Through this framework, I was able to categorize the Hilltop Youth as a gang. Once they were labeled as such, I explained that their existence provokes international authorities to question if the Israeli government is capable of following through with peaceful negotiations. I explained that although the Hilltop Youth are not as threatening as a terrorist organization, they are still problematic enough that measures should be taken to ensure their attacks do not continue.

Unfortunately, one academic year only begins to scratch the research potential for this project. If I had more time, I would have liked to meet with individuals in Israel to verbally communicate and understand the Hilltop Youth in their real context. I would enjoy the opportunity to speak to Hilltop Youth members to give them a chance to

explain for themselves their intentions and to also give them a voice outside of angry, biased newspaper headlines. In addition, my research only looked at the Israeli side of the situation. It would have been even more beneficial to have the Palestinian perspective as well to potentially counter some of my arguments. The Two-State Solution Theory is sensitive to both Israelis and Palestinians and in order to truly represent that stance, I should have incorporated the Palestinian narrative as well.

For future research, I recommend looking at the sociology behind the Hilltop Youth and other outlier organizations within Israel. The State is a new environment and I believe it could be beneficial to understand how sub-groups are created within a developing society. Perhaps research could highlight a root causation of how fringe groups are formed and can use that information to create tactics, which avoid the emergence of such groups in the future. The Hilltop Youth are only one group in Israel but there are others that operate similarly. I believe more research on groups like these can help depict what kind of environment Israeli youth live in. This in turn could lead to developing policy that augments the prevention of gangs in Israel or any other nation as well. Israeli society is unique and researchers should stay away from looking at just “The Conflict” as a whole and instead hone in on specific sectors in order to develop a more personalized context for the cumbersome situation.

The story of settlements, the Hilltop Youth, and the opportunity for peace between Israel and Palestine is constantly changing. What I write today may not be relevant tomorrow. Solutions and agreements are constantly made, recreated, or broken. Currently, both Israelis and Palestinians feel they must live on the defensive and on the brink of war. Israel and Palestine govern on turbulent grounds and the future for both

sides remains uncertain. What is clear is the Hilltop Youth are a violent group of vagabond children, which the Israeli government should not stand for. Their actions are to be condemned and in order for Israel to maintain its potential as a facilitator for peace, it must recognize, punish spoilers, and implement policy that disengages groups such as the Hilltop Youth from harming individuals of any kind.

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