

T. Mitchell Reviews Book on Israel's Radical Right

"*The Triumph of Israel's Radical Right*" by [Ami Pedahzur](#) (Oxford University Press, 2012, 211 pp.) is reviewed here by independent scholar, Thomas G. Mitchell, Ph.D., the "[Self-Hating Gentile](#)" blogger:



Prof. Ami Pedahzur

In 1991, Israeli political scientist Ehud Sprinzak published his landmark study, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right*, tracing the roots of Israel's extreme Right from the Revisionist Zionist movement of Ze'ev Jabotinsky and the Marxist territorial maximalism of Ahdut Ha'Avoda and the Jewish Defense League of Rabbi Meir Kahane. Sprinzak estimated that about 30 percent of the MKs from parties of the Right belonged to the Radical Right. Ami Pedahzur's sequel (he is a former student of Sprinzak) briefly recaps some of Sprinzak's analysis, and then begins his own narrative starting in 1973-74 with the founding of the Likud by Ariel Sharon and the rise of Gush Emunim, the militant settlement pressure group, and the emergence of Rabbi Kahane as an Israeli political figure.

Brought up and educated in Israel, where he was also a journalist, Pedahzur is a professor of government and head of Israel Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. He takes the narrative forward to the end of the Gaza war of January 2009. Whereas the anticipated further rise of far Right representation in the Knesset in this month's election is outside his book's scope, it's timely as background on what is likely to happen.

Shorter than Sprinzak's book at only 211 pages of text, it is also better organized. Pedahzur defines the Radical Right in terms of three characteristics: authoritarianism, nativism, and expansionism; he thereby does a better job than Sprinzak of defining who is part of the Radical Right, who is not and why.

Pedahzur sees Kahane's assassination in 1990 in New York as a major turning point. Although some of his followers remained active in successor parties to Kahane's Kach movement (one of them led by his son), secular political scientists and journalists expected that most of his followers would support Rehavam "Gandhi" Ze'evi's Moledet party, which advocated the

“voluntary” transfer of Arabs from the West Bank to Jordan. But since Kahane’s core followers were religious and Ze’evi was secular, they migrated instead to the Shas ultra-religious party of Sephardim and other “Eastern” Jews, thereby helping to radicalize it.

The major development of the last two decades has been the convergence of ultra-Orthodox non-Zionist Jews in parties like Shas and Agudat Israel, and religious Zionists within the Likud and the National Religious Party/ Jewish Home in what is known as the *khardelim* from the words *kharedim* (ultra-Orthodox) and *datim leumim* (religious nationalists). *Khardel* is the Hebrew word for mustard, and the *khardelim* have really spiced up the Right. This has resulted in a religious sector that is both more Zionist and more ultra-Orthodox.

The other major development has been the penetration of the Radical Right in the NRP and the Likud into the Israeli bureaucracies that control settlement. Thus Israel has a settler lobby that is even more effective and well-connected than the Algerian settler lobby inside the French Third, Fourth, and Fifth Republics. Pedahzur looks at the change in Sharon’s thinking that resulted in the disengagement from Gaza and the Likud’s rejection of his plan. Pedahzur also examines the takeover of the Likud by the settlers through Menahem Feiglin’s Jewish Leadership faction, which just ousted many veteran MKs from safe seats on the Likud list for the next election.

Pedahzur does not say that the two-state solution is impossible in so many words, but his whole argument leads to that conclusion. Those wishing to understand the results of the election later this month could do no better than to turn to Pedahzur’s new book as a guide.

My only criticism is that there is little comparative politics in this book. Sprinzak looked at the Israeli Radical Right in terms of the traditional Radical Right of Central and Eastern Europe from the interwar period. Pedahzur avoids even this. I would have liked to see a comparison with movements in French Algeria and France during the late Fourth Republic and early Fifth Republics, with the South African Afrikaner Right in the 1980s and early 1990s and with the loyalists in Northern Ireland during The Troubles. There are also a few very minor errors in the historical portion of the text, before the main narrative begins.