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At Any Price

Israeli Taxpayers
Funding "Price Tag"
Settler Violence

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At Any Price: Israeli Taxpayers Funding "Price Tag" Settler Violence

Most Israelis believe that the acts of violence against Palestinians known as "Price Tag" are the handiwork of a few extremist teenagers. Yet documents now exposed by Molad show this to be a strategy led by the settler leadership in order to deter the state from challenging the settler enterprise. Many Israelis will be shocked to learn that their taxes are used to promote illegal activity, which also targets Israeli security forces.

In recent years, and especially after last month's torching of a Palestinian family in their home,¹ the term "Price Tag" has achieved considerable notoriety. It refers, in the Israeli-Palestinian context, to acts of violence committed by right-wing Jewish extremists against Palestinians in the West Bank or within Israel, or against Israeli security forces. These acts run the gamut from spraying graffiti to physically attacking Palestinians and Israeli soldiers. Their purported aim is to deter the state of Israel from attempting to evacuate illegal settler outposts by showing that there is "a price to be paid". Despite concern among law enforcement authorities and the public at large, little is known about these illegal acts: who is behind them? What are they intended to achieve? Who is financing them? Few Israelis know that this criminal activity is, in fact, initiated by beneficiaries of generous state support.

The media, both in Israel and abroad, have consistently played along with the presentation of "Price Tag" offenders as a handful of crazed teens living on the fringes of Israeli society. In reality, these supposedly individual acts are part of a much larger framework: they are the result of a policy carefully planned by functionaries from the very heart of the settler establishment and financed by the state. **Israeli taxpayers are unknowingly funding a policy of violence against Palestinian civilians and Israeli security forces aimed at "exacting a price" from the state for any attempt to curb the settlement enterprise.**

1. tinyurl.com/nj9p25u

In response to harsh public criticism of these acts in recent years, the settler leadership repeatedly claimed that the offenders were merely a few 'rotten apples' on the margins of settler society. This could not be further from the truth: the concept of "Price Tag" was developed by nonprofits funded directly by branches of the state in the West Bank. Specifically, the Shomron (Samaria) Regional Council, an Israeli state authority in charge of settlements in the northern West Bank whose budget relies largely on state funds and grants, directly funds a nonprofit titled the Shomron Residents' Committee. Founded in 2008 by then-Council Head Gershon Mesika, the committee acts as the unofficial political arm of the council. It is currently headed by Benny Katzover. The Binyamin Regional Council, the state authority in charge of settlements in the central West Bank, established and funds a similar nonprofit titled the Binyamin Residents' Committee.

Gershon Mesika of the Shomron Regional Council recently garnered public attention when he became state witness in a vast corruption affair, in which right-wing organizations allegedly transferred money to members of Lieberman's Yisrael Beitenu party in exchange for receiving state funding. Israeli media has not picked up Mesika's extensive involvement with "Price Tag" activities behind the scenes, although in 2012, popular newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* exposed documents and testimony tying both Mesika and Katzover to these activities.² Mesika's deputy and acting head of the council, Yossi Dagan, also helped found the committee³ and used to be its spokesperson.⁴ His home address at the settlement of Shavey Shomeron is still registered with the Ministry of Justice as the committee's official mailing address.⁵ Despite Dagan's significant involvement with a nonprofit that promotes illegal activity, he is officially set to run for the senior position of council head this August. **As a result, Dagan, who studied under extremist right-wing rabbi Dov Lior and is considered close to Likud MK of ill repute Oren Hazan,⁶ is now trying to cover his tracks with the committee.⁷**

Mesika, Dagan, and Katzover have all gone to great lengths to prevent the exposure of evidence tying the Shomron Regional Council and its affiliated committee to "Price Tag" activities. Before *Yedioth Ahronoth* ran its investigative piece, the three threatened Israeli media with a million-shekel lawsuit. When this did not help, the council filed a libel suit against *Yedioth Ahronoth*, successfully preventing the publication of more details and

2. <http://tinyurl.com/otbhkoy>

3. <http://tinyurl.com/ptabsce>

4. <http://bit.ly/1MeiyDi>

5. <http://tinyurl.com/prguw6p>

6. <http://tinyurl.com/pvx4ccd>

7. <http://tinyurl.com/o7d2acq>

thwarting public debate on the matter. The suit was later quietly withdrawn, but the public damage was done.⁸ Beforehand, however, the court was provided with important material – exposed here for the first time.

Key findings

- **Israeli taxpayers are funding nonprofits that actively promote a policy of disrupting IDF operations and harming Palestinians.** The Shomron and Binyamin Residents' Committees, which receive millions of shekels a year from the state, first developed the "Price Tag" policy". Their functionaries call for illegal action to delay or prevent security forces from evacuating illegal settlement structures in the West Bank. These nonprofits were formed in order to act in ways that the official regional councils cannot. In a series of publications disseminated among right-wing activists, they called on their communities to carry out "Price Tag" acts and various illegal activities, including rioting and erecting new outposts, in order to deter the IDF from evacuation attempts. They also commended acts such as burning fields and other property and injuring Palestinian civilians. Urging citizens to break the law and encouraging violence constitutes incitement, which is considered a criminal offense under penal law.
- **Accessory liability.** The Shomron Committee's work plan – one of the documents first exposed here – calls on supporters to riot and block roads, attaching maps with detailed directions to locations that will guarantee maximum disturbance of security forces' work. Disseminating these maps allegedly constitutes accessory liability – funded by the Israeli taxpayer.

8. <http://www.the7eye.org.il/135412>

Background

"Price Tag" acts, which top IDF commanders have termed "Jewish terrorism",⁹ are intended primarily to exact a direct or indirect price from Israel's defense establishment in retaliation for any attempt to evacuate settlements or illegal settler outposts in the West Bank. Israel's right wing was extremely frustrated after the 2005 evacuation of all settlements in the Gaza Strip. Consequently, some settler leaders decided to render future evacuation of outposts in the West Bank impossible, or at least very difficult and expensive.¹⁰ Once they understood that disrupting IDF work was the most efficient way to prevent evacuation, they began to initiate illegal acts, including steps to "heat up" the West Bank in an attempt to burden security forces with work, deter policy makers, and physically prevent the evacuation of outposts.¹¹

According to police data, these activities include "blocking junctions, throwing stones at vehicles of Palestinians and of security forces, rioting, harming religious artifacts, and taking action against security forces".¹² In various cases, the offenders attacked IDF soldiers and Palestinian residents, broke into military bases, vandalized IDF property, monitored IDF activity, torched olive trees, and sprayed graffiti.¹³ Basically, the "Price Tag" strategy is to hassle IDF soldiers enough to divert them from their missions, making it difficult for them to enforce the law and implement government policy.

This new strategy was planned and publicized by the settlers of the Shomron and Binyamin Residents' Committees. In a collection of inner-circle documents exposed here, they explicitly call for "Price Tag" acts against Israeli security forces, including causing harm to Palestinian civilians as another means of exacting a price from the state. In some cases, the euphemism "Solidarity" was used instead of "Price Tag", but committee documents including discussions among right-wing activists clearly show the terms to be synonymous.¹⁴ Israel's internal security service (ISA, or Shin Bet) has also confirmed the close link between the two terms.¹⁵

9. <http://tinyurl.com/oa4xzbr>

10. <http://tinyurl.com/ns4zks8>

11. Ibid.

12. <http://tinyurl.com/nhk59h3>

13. "Tag Meir, 2014 summary", publication by the Tag Meir Forum, 01.15

14. <http://tinyurl.com/nktttq5>

15. <http://tinyurl.com/nuw4hxn>, <http://tinyurl.com/ooeo7oc>

For example, in 2008, the Shomron Residents' Committee called on settlers to carry out "Price Tag" acts so as to "create a huge workload" for security forces: "It is time to change the way we fight! Instead of concentrating at the outpost itself, our efforts must be scattered over as many locations as possible... Blocking several junctions, building outposts and taking teenagers on hikes in unusual places, all at the same time, will create a huge workload for the forces of destruction. This will start a battle on several fronts, the government will be unable to control it, and in the long run it will understand that such acts [i.e. dismantling an outpost – LS] are impossible."¹⁶

Benny Katzover, the head of the committee, recommended that activists block entrances to military bases with their bodies or "march on neighboring villages".¹⁷ A document exposed here for the first time reveals the extent of the committee's involvement in these activities. An article published on the committee's official website (and recently erased) was titled: "Solidarity. Yes, Some Call It Price Tag". **In the article, the committee clarified its central role in organizing "Price Tag" acts: "We, as a committee, round up the public, help with organization, inform people."**¹⁸ It also asked activists, "What has this got to do with hurting Arabs?" and provided a reply: "We believe that the boundaries of the struggle are broad." In this article, the committee encouraged settlers to commit a variety of acts that would weigh upon the security forces: "You can go down to the nearest junction and pray or not, block it or not, go down to a junction further away [and] block [it] or not. There can be all kinds of creative responses, each according to the specific public... The police will come quickly, that's important too, to know that every attempt to harm [the settlement enterprise – LS] opens floodgates."

Itzik Shadmi, head of the Binyamin Residents' Committee, also urged settlers to take action to harass soldiers. He suggested, among other things, blocking roads and establishing illegal outposts.¹⁹ Shadmi declared that he would personally ensure maximal organization and coordination and that actions against the military would be effectively synchronized using "a list of people with telephones who are alerted to the spot via text message". To prevent the evacuation of the Migron illegal outpost, for example, Shadmi announced that he would equip his people with helmets and clubs in order to confront law enforcement and security forces.²⁰

16. <http://tinyurl.com/nqal545>

17. <http://tinyurl.com/o889mz5>

18. <http://tinyurl.com/o395gx5>

19. <http://tinyurl.com/oa5agdg>

20. <http://tinyurl.com/p39wddv>

In these calls for action, intended for settlers and right-wing activists only, neither committee attempted to conceal the fact that they were actively endorsing lawbreaking. They also began wildly inciting against IDF soldiers and security forces – although these very forces risk their lives to protect settlers. In a letter he sent to Binyamin settlers, Shadmi described Israel's security forces as follows: "We have to address our opponents as criminals, period. Robbers who want to uproot you from your home and hand over your settlement to murderers and cheats."²¹

This top-level spirit quickly trickled down to the field. In May 2014, a youngster from the settlement of Itamar was arrested after writing on an Internet forum that Jewish (Halakhic) law does not prohibit killing an IDF soldier during a night-time attempt to evacuate an outpost. The young woman added that she was "in favor of throwing stones in certain situations, even if the stone kills a soldier".²² These statements drew harsh public criticism. Yet most Israelis do not know that for years now, right-wing extremists have been using designated forums to discuss the extent and ways in which it is permissible to injure IDF soldiers,²³ nor that authorities have exposed several rings that were providing vital information for sabotaging such evacuations.²⁴

Soldiers and police officers were indeed injured in several outpost evacuations, and vehicles and expensive military equipment were vandalized. For instance, in 2008, settlers set a dog on a company commander on reserve duty, broke the hand of a deputy battalion commander at the Yad Yair outpost, and punctured tires in the cars of soldiers on reserve duty. In Hebron, an army officer trying to stop Jewish children from throwing stones at Palestinians was attacked.²⁵ In 2011, dozens of right-wing extremists broke into the Efraim Regional Brigade base, vandalized vehicles, and attacked the brigade commander.²⁶ In 2012, the ISA (Shin Bet) warned of a sharp rise in the number of minors involved in terror attacks and in ideologically-driven violent activity.²⁷

In 2014, six Border Police officers were injured during the evacuation of four illegal outposts in the settlement of Yitzhar in the Shomron area. During the incident, hundreds of people

21. <http://tinyurl.com/oa5agdg>

22. <http://news.walla.co.il/item/2743778>

23. <http://bit.ly/iHMyqPy>

24. <http://bit.ly/ignGM43>

25. <http://bit.ly/iG6Jaka>

26. <http://tinyurl.com/d54ttwx>

27. <http://tinyurl.com/pgzrk5z>

threw stones at the officers, burned tires, and blocked roads.²⁸ That year, the tires of the Shomron Battalion Commander's vehicle were punctured twice to protest the demolition of illegal settlement structures,²⁹ and youngsters from Yitzhar smashed the windscreen of a lieutenant colonel serving with the Civil Administration (the Israeli entity officially in charge of civilian affairs in Area C of the West Bank, where most of the settlements are located and Israel retains full civilian and security control).³⁰

28. <http://bit.ly/1Mer5pI>

29. <http://news.walla.co.il/item/2735607>

30. <http://bit.ly/1NO9u8H>

State-supported criminal activity: How Israeli taxpayers are financing the creators of "Price Tag"

As noted above, in 2008, Gershon Mesika actively supported the establishment of the Shomron Residents' Committee, funded by the regional council and therefore by the state. It was his election promise as head of the council: to establish an independent entity that would fight future evacuations of settlements in the region.³¹ The committee recently caused a scandal in Israel by publishing a propaganda video comparing Israeli human rights organizations to Nazi collaborators executed by hanging. It also garnered attention by threatening to fire Palestinian employees in the West Bank unless a bill to mark produce from settlements was tabled. However, few Israelis know that the committee is also a major force behind the "Price Tag" policy: its members developed a detailed doctrine for struggling against the IDF and other Israeli security forces and repeatedly called on settlers to carry out illegal acts such as blocking roads, building illegal outposts, rioting, and even arson.

The Shomron Regional Council is primarily funded by the state and by various grants amounting to tens of millions of shekels a year. As it directly funds the nonprofit Residents' Committee, this means that Israeli taxpayers are financing the committee. According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), from 2008 to 2012, the state transferred 65% of the council's average yearly budget,³² or a total of 767.8 million shekels. In contrast, the state provides 44% of the average annual budget of all regional councils in Israel. It follows that the Shomron Regional Council relies heavily on state funding – while financing an organization that intentionally encourages causing harm to Palestinians and Israeli security forces.

According to the committee's nonprofit financial reports, it received 580,000 shekels from the council in its first year; by 2013, this grew to 1.2 million shekels (see Table 1).³³ In total, the committee received some 6.5 million shekels from the Shomron Regional Council. Molad is exposing here that the balance was covered by the Evangelical foundation "Shuva Yisrael", which donated 134,000 shekels to the committee in its first year.³⁴

31. <http://tinyurl.com/p5rnyev>

32. <http://bit.ly/tgnDuxu>

33. <http://tinyurl.com/nwpcncj>, <http://tinyurl.com/n2d3edz>

34. <http://tinyurl.com/oytcdpp>

Table 1: Shomron Residents' Committee budget (in Israeli shekels)

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Income from Shomron Regional Council	580,000	870,000	1,348,834	1,200,000	1,349,333	1,200,000
Income from donations	134,151	22,400	15,496	0	1,050	0
Income from activity	4,570	102,404	27,050	27,050	89,652	166,380
Total income	718,721	994,804	1,391,380	1,227,050	1,440,035	1,366,380
Council funding, out of total income	80%	87%	97%	98%	94%	88%

Source: Committee reports to the Ministry of Justice

As the figures clearly indicate, the committee is almost entirely financed by the council. Yet the heads of the committee choose to present it as "independent and disconnected from the establishment, neither feeding off it nor influenced by it."³⁵ This obfuscation is no coincidence: it is meant to provide the council with an extremist arm that will promote its goals, while keeping the council's image clear of the violent and illegal activity that attracts public criticism. The committee's registered address is the home of Yossi Dagan, who, as mentioned above, was Mesika's close advisor and is currently replacing him as head of the regional council. Other central members in the committee are the previous head of the council, Benny Katzover (now head of the committee), Sagie Keizler (operations director with an annual gross wage of 281,000 shekels³⁶), and Akiva Smotrich.

Similarly, the Binyamin Residents' Committee was established in collaboration with the head of the Binyamin Regional Council, Avi Ro'eh, who is currently also head of the YESHA Council (the settlements' lobby organization). When the committee was established, its head, Itzik Shadmi sent a letter sent to the region's settlers emphasizing that it was in touch with the head of the council but retained full freedom to act. "Obviously, the organization's independence will also serve the head of the council, and this is not the place to expand on that," Shadmi added.³⁷

35. <http://tinyurl.com/pfsq2dh>

36. <http://tinyurl.com/p4d8efz>

37. <http://tinyurl.com/oa5agdg>

The following figures, first exposed here by Molad, prove the extent to which Israeli taxpayers are financing the Binyamin Residents' Committee. It is generously funded by the Binyamin Regional Council: 1.5 million shekels in 2011, 730,000 shekels in 2012,³⁸ and 800,000 shekels a year in 2013 and 2014.³⁹ (see Table 2). In total, the committee has received 3.8 million shekels from the council. Shadmi emphasized that the committee is not restricted in any way: "We can do as we see fit."⁴⁰ Notably, the nonprofit does not currently have a certification of proper management from the Israel Corporations Authority.

Table 2: Binyamin Residents' Committee budget (in Israeli shekels)

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Income from Binyamin Regional Council	1,500,000	730,000	800,000	800,000
Income from donations	194,557	0	N/A	N/A
Total income	1,694,557	730,000	N/A	N/A
Council funding, out of total income	88%	100		

Source: Committee reports to the Ministry of Justice and report detailing state support of Binyamin Regional Council

38. <http://tinyurl.com/q3p6dqr>; <http://tinyurl.com/of6wlo4>

39. <http://tinyurl.com/qhfx84r> ; <http://tinyurl.com/pr23n5c>

40. <http://tinyurl.com/otbhkoy>

From "Solidarity" to "Price Tag": Strategic development of settler violence in the West Bank

The Shomron Residents' Committee operates on two levels, using dual terminology to do so. On one hand, it panders to the public consensus by taking VIPs on tours of the West Bank, arranging photo opportunities for celebrities at boutique wineries in settlements, and developing Israeli tourism in settlements. On the other hand, it hides from the general public that its functionaries are in an ongoing dialogue with the settler right wing, voicing extreme positions that include explicitly calling for lawbreaking and action against IDF soldiers and security forces. This communication is carried out in local pamphlets, settler newspapers, and social media. "The establishment of the committee is a shift **from defense to offense**. Gone are political persecution, uprooting, and evacuations,"⁴¹ read the committee's website (this statement has since been erased).

In 2008, when they learned that security forces were quickly evacuating outposts without prior notice, the committee leaders decided to they had to take drastic measures. The new mode of response they came up with was first named "Solidarity", in a bid for sympathy. Already then, this euphemism was replaced with "Price Tag" in discussions among right-wing activists.⁴² One of the first documents to address this new strategy was a special advertisement for settlers published in June 2008 under the title "Solidarity as a Key to Victory".⁴³ The advertisement was signed by the Shomron Residents' Committee, the Binyamin Residents' Committee, and the Homesh First headquarters (an organization whose mission statement is to rebuild the settlements destroyed in the 2005 disengagement). The signatories complained of the "element of surprise" employed by "the forces of destruction" (the security forces), and called on settlers to confront soldiers, build illegal outposts, and block junctions:

"A series of outposts is currently being destroyed in Shomron, Binyamin, and Judea. The forces come quietly to an outpost, demolish it quickly before protests develop, and hastily retreat. Past experience has taught us that mobilizing masses to reach an outpost from distant areas, under such circumstances, is almost

41. <http://tinyurl.com/p2zvs3m>

42. <http://bit.ly/1JOGG1J>, <http://bit.ly/1Mezt8w>

43. <http://tinyurl.com/nqal545>

impossible. Most people will not get there in time, and those who do will usually not be able to win the battle. It is time to change the way we fight! Instead of concentrating at the outpost itself, our efforts must be scattered over as many points as possible. Every junction, every new outpost or open space, are a good and practical target for the struggle. **In practice, blocking several junctions, building outposts and taking teenagers on hikes at unusual places, all the same time, will create a huge workload for the forces of destruction. This will create a battle on several fronts, the government will be unable to control it, and in the long run it will understand that such acts (i.e. dismantling an outpost - LS) are impossible.**"

This new strategy was created in order to thwart or delay attempts by security forces to enforce the law, and exact a heavy price from them for doing so. It poses a real threat to IDF soldiers by interfering with the military's ability to operate adequately in an area that is sensitive from a security perspective, and turns soldiers – who risk their lives to protect settlers – into babysitters for a group of lawbreakers.

Shadmi, the head of the Binyamin Residents' Committee, was one of the first people to use the term "Price Tag". Following the attempt to evacuate the Migron outpost in 2008, he explained that "experience proves that if you are violent and inconsiderate and do not try to persuade, but rather force the government down on its knees, you succeed. What we saw last week is peanuts. Everything comes with a price tag, and the State of Israel has to consider whether it is willing to bear the consequences."⁴⁴ The head of the Shomron Residents' Committee, Benny Katzover, also explained at various opportunities that "Price Tag" acts are aimed primarily at security forces: "First, we must create deterrence – build cells in every settlement, so that they are ready for battle. I do not suggest that [they] try us. Playtime is over. A determined battle without hesitation is the right model. We can reach a scale that no government will dare to take on."⁴⁵ Another time, he explained the new strategy: "You evacuate an outpost? Okay. From now on, we will respond to every evacuation of every trailer. There will always be an act of protest in response, and we have a wide array of possible actions. The message is that no evacuation will go unchallenged. It forces the police and army to go to a lot of effort."⁴⁶

44. <http://tinyurl.com/p39wddv>

45. <http://tinyurl.com/pfgzije>

46. <http://tinyurl.com/o889mz5>

The rationale for the new strategy was also explained in right-wing newspaper *Besheva*. After the first "Price Tag" acts in Yitzhar in June 2008, this settler mouthpiece ran an article quoting representatives of the settlers' protest organization on new ways to respond to outpost evacuations: "Entering Arab villages nearby and destroying [property – LS]... Provoking unrest in wide areas as a means of protesting against demolition or evacuation, and not just at the particular site where the demolition took place."⁴⁷ A committee activist explained: "Every such act will force them [the military and police – LS] to work on the ground for an entire week afterwards." The article claimed that the method had proven itself valuable, as IDF forces had reported on a two-way radio that they were unable to dispatch soldiers to attend to every illegal act of protest in the area. These acts included torching pastures and homes.

47. <http://tinyurl.com/ns4zks8>

Battle tactics: Explicitly advocating harm to IDF soldiers

The "Price Tag" strategy was first employed in June 2008, after police and military forces demolished an illegal structure in the Givat Shaked outpost near Yitzhar. Among other things, olive groves owned by Palestinians were torched. After that incident, the Shomron Residents' Committee published a statement in the Qedumim Local Council newspaper commending the resistance to the evacuation, which included blocking roads and the setting of many fires: "This is a true example of how the boundaries of the battle are set by our residents."⁴⁸ The regional council, headed by Gershon Mesika, was quick to station a "renewed and glorious trailer" at the site as soon as the incident was over.

In documents submitted to the court, first exposed here by Molad, the committee presented a "work plan" and distributed it to settlers.⁴⁹ One side of the page was lip service in the form of calling residents to avoid confrontation with the security forces. On the other side, however, the committee explicitly called for "Price Tag" actions, under the euphemism of "Solidarity": "The forces of destruction are preparing to carry out a military operation, and our ability to prevent their arrival is partial. The destruction must not proceed without an adequate response... We call on the settler public to go to the junction in the evening for significant activity... At the end of every incident, the commanders sit and sum up what happened. It is very important that this summary include an understanding that any attempt at demolition will mean confrontation at junctions... Attached is a call by the Residents' Committee, signed by the rabbis and chairs of the settlement secretariats, for "Solidarity!". Attached to the document was a map of the important junctions to block in order to maximize the disruption of IDF activity. These documents clearly prove that the Shomron Residents' Committee used public funds to coordinate illegal activity with a single purpose: to make it difficult for military forces to carry out their security missions, in order to protect the outpost enterprise. In Israeli media, settler leaders argued that "Price Tag" activists were little more than troubled teens,⁵⁰ but that is not the case. As Molad is now exposing for the first time,⁵¹ the regional council was informed of the major points in "activity reports" issued by the committee. The council's executive director and treasurer were clearly

48. <http://tinyurl.com/netd6a2>

49. <http://tinyurl.com/on2ejln>

50. <http://tinyurl.com/np7s5fn>

51. <http://tinyurl.com/or5q4fp>

notified that these reports indicated use of council funds to finance "Price Tag" activity.

In other words, the regional council knowingly transferred funds to these militant leaders, who did not always bother to hide their actions. Benny Katzover said in an interview with *Ma'ariv* that in order to prevent the evacuation of outposts, the entrances to military bases must be blocked and Palestinian communities harassed: "You can stand with a sign next to a junction but, who knows, the sign could suddenly move to the middle of the road and block it. You can also burn tires. There is something relatively new that we are doing, protest sit-ins in front of the battalion bases. Sometimes we just sit there, and sometimes we block the road, but only to convey the message. You can also march towards an Arab village. I recommend this less, but entering an Arab village is also possible."⁵²

The context for this quote was a revenge spree carried out by settlers from Yitzhar against the Palestinian village of 'Asira al-Qibliyah in September 2008, in retaliation for the stabbing of a child in the Shalhevet outpost near Yitzhar. Some 100 settlers fired in the air, threw stones, vandalized property, and torched homes in the village. Katzover voiced his dissatisfaction: "There was shooting, true. But it was in the air. The only thing that took place was stone throwing. And only at windows, not at people. These stones are thrown only towards the outskirts of the village, and they hit windows, shutters, maybe cars... The message was too weak."⁵³

According to a senior source in the YESHA Council,⁵⁴ in July 2010, Katzover personally organized the blocking of 15 junctions in response to the demolition of a trailer at the Givat Ronen outpost. Hundreds of right-wing demonstrators rallied to the call, clashed with Border Police forces, and torched several Palestinian fields close to Yitzhar.⁵⁵ At the time, Katzover made sure to personally⁵⁶ call on the public to riot and block roads in response to the incident, and even threatened: "They can sit on the road, they don't need cars. I know from rumors that in some places, other actions will be taken, in the spirit of the famous price tag activities." He disingenuously added: "We are not calling for that." Katzover's show of innocence is particularly embarrassing given the document issued by both committees at exactly the same time, which clearly called for action to exact a price from the IDF. The document was accompanied by a map of junctions that read: "The forces of destruction came again to Samaria today... As planned by the Residents' Committee, [and] the rabbis

52. <http://tinyurl.com/o889mz5>

53. Ibid.

54. <http://tinyurl.com/otbhkoy>

55. <http://bit.ly/tHMEaIR>

56. <http://bit.ly/tS8u84p>

and the secretariats of the settlements, the residents are called upon to go out and carry out "Solidarity" in the junction nearest your home... We must all take part in the protest! ... Solidarity. We will not let the forces wreak destruction and then go home and rest."⁵⁷

While Katzover emphasized that the illegal riots were organized by the Shomron Residents' Committee under his leadership, he preferred to conceal the millions of taxpayer shekels transferred annually to the committee. "We are an entity that is independent and disconnected from the establishment, neither feeding from it nor influenced by it," he claimed.⁵⁸ Another time, he explained the special status enjoyed by the nonprofit: "An action committee can afford to do what others cannot. I have no restrictions, although everything is done in cooperation."⁵⁹

57. <http://tinyurl.com/nmczaue>

58. <http://tinyurl.com/pfsq2dh>

59. <http://tinyurl.com/o889mz5>

An outpost war-room: Tracking IDF forces

In 2012, a document submitted to the court revealed that the leaders of the Shomron Residents' Committee had assisted a ring that had organized a severe "Price Tag" action in which settlers rioted at the Efraim Regional Bridge base, vandalized military vehicles, injured the deputy brigade commander, and threw stones at the brigade commander.⁶⁰ Documents submitted by the Jerusalem District Attorney's Office to the court⁶¹ indicate that the organizers, who wished to prevent the evacuation of an outpost, employed look-outs and scouts and managed to gather sensitive intelligence on the movement of IDF troops; they also obtained many classified documents, including aerial photographs of military bases.⁶²

Four months before this grave incident, several members of the ring were issued restraining orders barring them from returning to home to Yitzhar. This was based on intelligence gathered by the ISA (Shin Bet) indicating that they intended to organize violent "Price Tag" actions in the West Bank.⁶³ One of the members, a right-wing extremist by the name of Akiva Hacoheh, had already been charged with ten previous offenses including aggravated assault, assaulting a police officer, and possession of brass knuckles.⁶⁴ The ISA (Shin Bet) even tied these activists to the torching of mosques and Palestinian vehicles. This, however, did not stop Gershon Mesika, then head of the Shomron Regional Council, from coming to their defense. He attended an "evening of support" in their honor⁶⁵ and even laid the blame on the security forces, stating that "the Shin Bet has committed an unforgivably villainous act."

According to the indictment,⁶⁶ a short while later, the members of this ring operated an "outpost war-room" – a call center for collecting information about "suspicious" movements of security forces. The center received reports about the deployment of IDF forces, missions, and troop sizes. The Shin Bet caught in the possession of these convicted activists a detailed document revealing where they got their information before they committed the offenses. The sources included committee leaders Yossi Dagan, Benny Katzover, and Sagie Keizler.

60. <http://tinyurl.com/d54ttxw>

61. <http://tinyurl.com/ne9qtk5>

62. <http://bit.ly/1Hg4lvA>

63. <http://tinyurl.com/qharqg7>

64. See sentence in case 13747-01-12, State of Israel v. Akiva Pinhas Hacoheh et al.

65. <http://tinyurl.com/nmko2qc>

66. <http://bit.ly/1Cpdpbu>

Katzover confirmed that the committee was involved⁶⁷ and clarified how taxpayers were funding the illegal activity. He stated that for years now, the committee has been operating "an emergency center that receives calls from residents reporting unusual movement of IDF forces, in order to alert us about intentions to expel and destroy [settlements – LS]... We have tens of thousands of people who signed up for this text message service, and it has proven itself time and again. If this activity, which I believe is completely democratic and calls for people to carry out legitimate protest... is a form of espionage, then I am a spy, too." Katzover's reliance on democracy is surprising, given his statement that "the Israeli democracy is finished, and must be dismantled and bow down to Judaism."⁶⁸

67. <http://tinyurl.com/nlu7hee>

68. <http://tinyurl.com/7p56wfu>



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