

JULY 4, 2011

Parashat Balak

The Pot and the Kettle

And Moab was exceedingly afraid of the nation (Numbers 22:3) (ויגר מואב מפני העם במדבר כב:ג)

In Deuteronomy (2:9) God tells Moses, “Be not at enmity with Moab, neither contend with them in battle; for I will not give thee of his land for a possession.” In light of this instruction, commentators struggle to comprehend Balak, the Moabite king’s, overwhelming fear of the Jewish people. If God gave explicit instructions to Moses forbidding an attack against Moab, why was Balak afraid? Ramban (on 22:3) acknowledges that Balak knew that the Jews would not attack, but nonetheless joined forces with Midian against the Jews because he said, “They will lick up in their numbers our surroundings like the ox licks up the grass of the field, and they will conquer all the surrounding [nations] as they did to the Emorite kings and they will indenture us to them.”

While Balak knew that the Children of Israel would not attack them, in his mind the possible presence of the Jewish people marked a threat to his nation’s future. Today, Iran seems to be taking a page directly out of Balak’s playbook, by considering the sheer existence of Israel a threat to its well-being.

Iran, the leading state sponsor of international terrorism, which supplies arms and funding to global terrorist groups including Hizballah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, recently convened an “International Conference on Global Fight Against Terrorism,” in Tehran. In a letter to U.N. Secretary Ban Ki-moon and U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice regarding the conference, Hillel Neuer, executive director of U.N. Watch wrote that, “the opening message by Iranian Supreme Leader [Ayatollah Ali] Khamenei attacked the United States, Britain and some Western governments, as having a ‘black record in terrorist behaviors,’ ‘satanic world powers,’ and ‘terrorist organizations’” [Fox News](#) reported. Moreover, according to [The Jerusalem Post](#), in private discussions on the sidelines of the conference Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Lebanese Foreign Minister Adnan Monsour were able to agree that Israel “remains the main threat and a major source of terror and instability in the region.” For more on Iran, please visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

In an attempt to convince the people of Midian to join his effort to destroy the Jewish people, Balak ignored the fact that the Jews had no intention of attacking his country. Instead, he described the Jewish people as an imminent threat to his national security. Iran’s president too seems impervious to the facts on the ground. While his terror-supporting regime actively threatens world peace, he ironically applies the “terrorist” label to victims of his terrorism. ■

A Fruitless Effort

And the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam (Numbers 22:8) (וישבו שרי מואב עם בלעם במדבר כב:ח)

After hatching his plan to hire Balaam to curse the Jewish people, Balak reached out to the rival nation of Midian and suggested that they hire the wicked prophet together. Yet, while originally both the princes of Moab and the princes of Midian requested that Balaam curse the Jewish nation, after Balaam told them to stay the night, “and I will bring you back word, as the Lord may speak to me,” (22:8), only the princes of Moab remained. What happened to the princes of Midian? The Talmud (Sanhedrin 105a) explains that they went home. “They said: there is no father that hates his

children.” When they realized that Balaam would only curse Israel if he received God’s permission—which would not come, they realized the futility of their actions and abandoned the plan, leaving Moab to press on alone.

Like the leadership of Midian wisely questioned their original efforts and chose a new direction, voices within the leadership of the Palestinian Authority (PA) have similarly begun to publicly question the plan to seek recognition of a Palestinian state in the United Nations.

Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad recently expressed his reservations about the current PA bid to unilaterally seek U.N. recognition of a Palestinian state, [The Associated Press](#) reported. Fayyad warned that U.N. recognition would simply be a symbolic victory for the Palestinians and would not change anything on the ground. “It is not going to be a dramatic result and I do not believe it will be right to continue...” he said. Fayyad’s skepticism sets him apart from President Mahmoud Abbas and other top PA officials who formally adopted the U.N. plan earlier this week. According to [AFP](#), Abbas told a meeting of the Palestine Liberation Organization and his Fatah party that, “Until now there have been no new incentives to return to negotiations.” Both Israel and the U.S. strongly object to the Palestinians’ attempt to seek U.N. recognition, urging them instead to resume negotiations. For more on how Palestinian provocations are undermining U.S. peace efforts, click [here](#).

While their plan to curse the Jewish people initially seemed sound, the people of Midian quickly realized its futility and changed course. In these complex times, the Palestinian leadership should follow the Midianites example and abandon their fruitless efforts to unilaterally declare statehood in the United Nations. ■

A Fundamental Jewish Value

He crouched, he lay down as a lion (Numbers 24:9)

כרע שכב כארי (במדבר כד:ט)

The Talmud (Berachot 12b) notes that the sages wished to add the entire parashah of Balak to the daily *Shema* recitation, and only refrained from doing so because its length would impose an undue burden on the people. What was so special that the sages saw such great importance in this *parashah*? The Talmud explains, “Said Rav Yossi bar Avin, It is because of the verse, ‘He crouched, he lay down as a lion.’” What is so important about this line that the sages considered mandating its recitation every day? Rabbi Isaac HaKohen Kook explained (See Ein Ayah on Berachot) that according to Rashi (on 24:9), the verse emphasizes Israel’s physical and national security, meaning that Israel will crouch like a lion because they will, “dwell in their land with strength and bravery.” This teaches us, wrote Rav Kook, “that just as accepting the yoke of heaven [by reciting the *Shema*] is a fundamental Torah principle...similarly, the security and strength of Israel is also a fundamental Torah ideal.”

The sages considered including the verse in the daily *Shema* to emphasize the religious imperative of a strong and secure Jewish state. Nowadays, America’s support helps ensure that Israel maintains this fundamental Jewish value.

U.S. security assistance to Israel in the annual foreign aid bill is the most tangible manifestation of American support, especially during a time of such turmoil in the Middle East. Aid is a vital component of congressional commitments that ensure the Jewish state maintains a qualitative military edge. Even with an expanding military outlay, Israel finds herself surrounded by neighbors who have increased their overall military budgets. The growth rate of Saudi Arabia’s military budget is almost six times that of Israel’s, while Iran’s rate of military spending has grown 16 times more than that of Israel. Lebanon too has ramped up arms imports, and Iran continues to fund Hizballah’s military expansion. With these threats and costs in mind, both Congress and President Obama have supported the funding of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Israel each year since the agreement went into effect in fiscal year 2009. Congress should support the administration’s current request for \$3.075 billion in security assistance for Israel in fiscal year 2012 in order to enable Israel to meet these evolving threats, and ensure that she has the arms she needs to maintain a qualitative military edge over potential adversaries.

After all, guaranteeing a strong and secure Israel is not only in America’s strategic interest, but is also a fundamental Jewish value that must be upheld. ■

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