



Sermon Tidbits

MARCH 7, 2016

Parashat Pekudei

Robust Oversight

These are the accounts of the tabernacle (Exodus 38:21)

אלה פקודי המשכן (שמות לח:כא)

Last year, Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ), together with Senator Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Representative Nita Lowey (D-NY) asked the government's non-partisan General Accounting Office (GAO) to prepare a report on the International Atomic Energy Association's (IAEA) capacity to monitor and verify Iran's adherence to restrictions on its nuclear program set by the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Simply put, they wanted to know if the IAEA is up to the task of ensuring that Iran isn't cheating on the deal. Last week, during a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senators reviewed the initial findings from the GAO's report, [which were not encouraging](#). Senator Menendez noted troubling vulnerabilities in the IAEA's capacity to monitor and verify Iran's adherence to restrictions on its nuclear program. "GAO's preliminary observations point directly to future problems with monitoring, verifying and meeting the requirements of the JCPOA," Menendez said. Senator Kirk observed something similar, "My biggest takeaway is that lawmakers must come together in a bipartisan manner now to create an insurance policy for imposing crippling pressure if and when Iran once again cheats on nuclear inspections as it has so many times in the past." The final report may well raise questions about whether the IAEA is up to the critical job of overseeing whether Iran adheres to the terms of the nuclear agreement.

Parashat Pekudei begins with a detailed accounting of the expenditures used to construct the Tabernacle, from the gold—"twenty and nine talents, and seven hundred and thirty shekels," (verse 24) to the silver—"a hundred talents, and a thousand seven hundred and three-score and fifteen shekels," (verse 25) to the copper—"seventy talents and two thousand and four hundred shekels." (verse 29) Yet, nowhere do we find a commandment to conduct this very detailed audit, so then why does Moses do it? Rabbi Menachem Becker (see Parparot L'Torah vol. 2 p. 195) notes that while the people never asked Moses to provide an accounting for the valuable materials used in the project, Moses himself demanded a precise accounting and examination of every aspect of the ambitious project, to fulfill the verse, "And you shall be clean before Adonai and before Israel," (Numbers 32:22) a commandment which admonishes us to refrain from behavior that raises suspicion of wrongdoing. Moses sought to set the example that no one is above public scrutiny, and that strong oversight represents a critical element of good public policy.

All the more so, it stressed the importance of robust oversight over himself, despite the fact that the nation implicitly trusted him, we must also stress the critical need for robust oversight over Iran—a nation that the world cannot trust. While Iran now enjoys the benefits of access to its frozen assets and to financial markets around the world, it has continued to flout the will of the international community in numerous ways. Over the past two months, Iran has ignored international sanctions by "[doubling](#)" its efforts to develop a ballistic missile program. Iranian navy ships also detained and photographed U.S. Navy soldiers after their vessel strayed into Iranian waters, and then [gave out](#) "[medals of conquest](#)" to the commanders who arrested the American seamen. This and other concerning behavior clearly indicates that Iran has not fundamentally changed following the agreement with the international community, and will look for every opportunity to cheat on its agreement and advance its nuclear ambitions as it has done many times in the past. In fact, in its very first report on Iranian compliance with the JCPOA, the IAEA reported last month that Iran "[briefly](#)" exceeded the limit of heavy water used in nuclear reactors set by the agreement.

This is a dangerous moment for America and its allies as Iran regains strength and acquires the resources to expand its military capabilities. To confront the threats Tehran poses, Congress and the president must exercise robust oversight of Iran's behavior to ensure that Iran does not cheat on the deal, and respond to any Iranian violations of the JCPOA with certain, swift and severe penalties. ■

Honest Accounting

All the gold that was used for the work (Exodus 38:24)

כל הזהב העשוי למלאכה (שמות לח:כד)

Every craftsman knows that any building or creative project entails a certain amount of waste. While we try and minimize the waste, there's always leftover material. And, even if it were possible to procure the exact amount of materials needed for a project, there's always cut materials that can't be repurposed. By their very nature, creating and building entail some small measure of waste—except in the Tabernacle.

The Midrash notes that the nature of the spending for the Tabernacle was literally miraculous, as Bezalel and his team achieved the impossible: they did not waste any money or materials during the entire project. Every single shekel donated towards the endeavor went directly towards the necessary materials. Commenting on the verse which accounts for, “All the gold that was used...” Ohr Hachayim (on verse 24) explains that, “None was missing, nor lost through negligence, nor stolen—rather all of it went into the ‘holy work’... Here the verse teaches us that there was a miracle... that during the work, none of materials were lost... and that from everything prepared for the work nothing was left as waste—everything was used in all of the holy work.”

While no one expects the miraculous results that the Jews achieved in the desert, when dedicating money to a project, one expects a full and honest accounting and an assurance that our precious resources weren't used for terror, yet Iran donates money and weapons for the opposite reason. Iran provides significant financial and material support to Palestinian terrorist groups, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. With this support, Hamas has dramatically bolstered the size, accuracy and range of its rocket arsenal—which Iran replenished following each of the three large-scale conflicts it provoked with Israel. Iranian expertise can also be seen in Hamas' complex underground tunnel network. During the 2014 war, Israel uncovered and destroyed 32 Hamas tunnels, which penetrated into Israel from Gaza. These tunnels were intended to threaten Israeli communities and kidnap and kill Israelis. Fewer than two years later, an estimated 1,000 Hamas workers are rebuilding the attack tunnel network, diverting materials provided by the international community to rebuild Gaza's homes and civilian infrastructure. Although Hamas-Iran ties have been strained of late due to Hamas opposition to Syria's Assad regime, Iran claims to have helped rearm Hamas and reconstruct its attack tunnels since its 2014 conflict with Israel.

The United States must stand with Israel by preventing Hamas from diverting weapons and resources and ensure that a mechanism is in place to prevent Hamas from using building materials to reconstruct terror tunnels and further advance its terrorist infrastructure as it has done in the past. America must continue to ensure that Israel has the resources to purchase the weapons and develop the systems needed to respond decisively to threats ranging from Hamas to a potential nuclear armed Iran and that none of it go to waste. ■

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