

AUGUST 20, 2018

Parashat Ki Teitzei

Israel's Age Old Foe

When you go out to battle (Deut. 20:1)

כי תצא למלחמה (דברים כ:א)

This week's parasha begins with war and ends with war. It begins as a continuation of the various rules of war already mentioned in the previous parasha of *Shoftim*. However, the first war described is against an unknown, unspecified and unidentified enemy. It is so to speak, a generic war, fought for causes that are not clear and in undetermined circumstances. The first war is not a mandatory one. The Torah prefaces it with the word "ki"—when or if—you go to war. Many of the commentators have transferred the scene of battle from warring with external physical enemies to a struggle with one's own self and one's base desires and inappropriate behavior. The second war is one of the mitzvot of the Torah, the term used in Jewish law is *milchemet mitzvah*. It is described at the end of the parsha and is fought against a bitter age-old foe, Amalek, and is a war of self-preservation. It is obligatory on all. It is to save Israel from the hands of an enemy whose sole intention is to annihilate us. The wars therefore differ not only in purpose and cause but in intensity as well. In the war against Amalek we seek not temporary triumph but permanent achievement. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, a preeminent talmudic sage of the 20th century, argued that the definition of Amalek is not based on genealogical descent from the ancient desert tribe, rather it relates to a nation or organization who identify with the philosophy of Amalek. When encountering a nation or organization that aligns itself with the Amalekite philosophy, Israel must be on guard and prepared to engage in a *milchemet mitzvah* which brings security and safety to the nation.

Concentrated along Israel's northern border, in Beirut's suburbs, and throughout the Bekaa Valley, Hezbollah poses a direct threat to Israel. Deploying a significant hybrid force, including both military and terrorist components, the group's arsenal exceeds many national armies. With an estimated 150,000 rockets and missiles, Hezbollah can strike any location in Israel. Hezbollah has placed Lebanese civilians at extreme risk in any future conflict by implanting its forces, missiles, and weapons caches in civilian areas. The terrorist group is [stronger today](#) than ever before and [gaining combat experience in Syria](#). The next war in Lebanon will likely be far worse than that of 2006. One way to help combat the threat from Hezbollah is by cutting off its financing. The U.S. Congress working to do just that through the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Amendments Act of 2017 ([H.R. 3329](#) / [S. 1595](#)) that would impose additional sanctions on the terrorist organization and those that support it. The bill is currently in committee; S.1595 passed the Senate by unanimous consent on Oct. 5, 2017, and H.R. 3329 passed the House by voice vote on Oct. 25, 2017.

[Twelve years](#) after the last war between Israel and Hezbollah, the IDF is currently drilling for another round of conflict with the Lebanese terror group. Troops from the 7th Armored Brigade as well as from Golani, from the Combat Engineering Corps and others participated in the drill where they went up against "Hezbollah" fighters, training them on new threats developed by the enemy. According to the senior officer, soldiers and commanders must be able to fight the enemy on four fronts: underground, on land, in the air and online. If in previous wars troops could visualize the enemy in one clear location, Hezbollah has become much harder to visualize, with fighters who arrive, attack and retreat within seconds. The IDF therefore needs to be able to "close the circle" on Hezbollah militants faster than ever and with more precise weapons to ensure the least amount of civilian casualties. In the years since the last conflict between Israel and Hezbollah the group has gained immeasurable fighting experience in Syria as well as new advanced weaponry from their patrons in Iran. According to the senior officer the ground forces will need to be deployed to conquer enemy territory and destroy its weapons stores, especially rocket launchers in order to minimize the number of missiles and rockets the enemy can fire onto the home front. The use of drones by the Islamic State group against Syrian or Iraqi troops has been studied by the IDF, which believes that a future conflict with Hezbollah might see similar uses. Israel said the drone fell due to technical malfunctions. Since the last war between Israel and Hezbollah, the border

has seen relative quiet. But nonetheless the IDF sees this border as the most explosive with troops ready for the quiet to be broken at any instant.

When Israel faces adversaries, the Torah advises that it is incumbent to do all that is necessary to ensure safety and security from these threats. We pray for the soldiers of Israel who are defending the borders of Israel and pray that there not be any more escalation of violence. We pray for a path of peace that will bring calm and tranquility to the region and for all those who live in in fear and danger. ■

Resolve and Resilience

Who is afraid and weak-hearted (Deut. 20:8)

מי האיש הירא ורך הלבב (דברים כ:ח)

Prime Minister Netanyahu recently met with his senior ministers regarding the status of violence from Gaza. In a single week more than 200 rockets were launched out of Gaza into southern Israel, along with fire kites and balloons, forcing Israel to respond with airstrikes on Hamas targets. The United States [denounced](#) Hamas' attacks and defended Israel's response, a position reiterated by lawmakers from both sides of the aisle. The other week, a giant 13-foot incendiary kite landed on power lines near Kibbutz Sufa. In addition, some 9,000 Palestinians engaged in mass violent riots on the Gaza-Israel border. Although we have seen an apparent reprieve in violence from Gaza, the situation remains quite serious with [more mass riots](#) expected.

Before going to war, a designated Kohen is appointed to accompany the nation, he is known as the *Kohen Mashuach Milchama*. What was the unique role of this Kohen? This Kohen and officers of the nation addressed the people before they enter into battle. They spoke to the people and verbalized the following message: "Who is afraid and weak-hearted? He should go and return to his home and not weaken the hearts of his brothers—as his heart is weakened" (Deut. 20:8). Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra and other commentators discuss this unique pronouncement of the Kohen. Ibn Ezra argued that having those who are 'weak of heart' amongst the fighters will undermine the courage of the others; therefore they are invited to leave before the battle begins (Ibn Ezra 20:5). The Kohen, even more importantly, offers an uplifting message to the fighters of Israel conveying to them that they are not relying on their own strength when they confront the enemy—there is divine assistance in their mission. God will protect and rescue the people of Israel. This may be the reason why the Kohen does not just offer a message in his own words, but rather he reads this very section from a Torah scroll. When the Kohen would read the words: "For the Lord your God goes before you to do battle on your behalf with your enemies and to save you," (Deut. 20:4) these words were meant to inspire and fortify the fighters and the entire congregation of Israel. Hearing this powerful message the soldiers of Israel would more effectively focus on their objectives, overcome anxiety, and confidently engage in the sacred mission to protect and bring security and wellbeing to the nation.

Unfortunately, the Jewish homeland faces the ongoing challenge of defending and subduing dangerous foes that threaten her safety. The state of Israel is stronger knowing that it has the unwavering support of the U.S. in this critical endeavor.

The United States has long defined Israel's survival and security as important to its own national interests. Through executive commitment and legislative action, America provides Israel with annual security assistance that helps the Middle East's only democracy defend itself—by itself—against mounting security threats. The United States has supported Israel politically since its inception in 1948. But it was not until the late 1960s that it began to regularly provide security assistance to the Jewish state. Since then, America has consistently provided Israel with security assistance to help it stay strong and deter its enemies. By means of its annual foreign aid, U.S. security assistance to Israel is the most tangible manifestation of American support for the Jewish state. Assistance primarily takes the form of funding for Israel to purchase the arms needed to defend itself from its adversaries. In an increasingly uncertain Middle East, Israel is the one stable democratic ally upon which America can consistently depend. Cooperation between the two countries in intelligence, homeland security, missile defense and counterterrorism has helped the United States meet its growing security challenges. U.S. support for Israel helps deter regional conflict by making clear to potential foes that they cannot defeat the Jewish state. The Israel-American alliance is a critical facet in ensuring a greater sense of confidence and conviction when the Jewish state stands strong to her adversaries and working together towards fulfilling the lofty goal in securing stability and peace in the region. ■

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