Defiance, if necessary

written by David M. Weinberg | 22.03.2024

The Purim tale, retold through the biblical Book of Esther in Jewish communities around the world this weekend, provides an excellent lesson to presidents, prime ministers, and commoners in understanding the link between providence and human endeavor, and the challenges of Jewish history.

The megillah hints that beyond the intrigue of royal courtyards; behind the politics of a White House or a Kremlin; and besides the movement of foreign and threatening military forces – lies a hidden hand operating on a transcendental plane.

Beyond the grasp of man's finite mind, there is order and purpose. There is a higher divine order into which man has not been initiated. In short, what appears random, isn't. The "pur" (the "happenstance" hinted at in the word Purim) is really planned.

And thus, over and above the threatening actors around us – from the time of Haman in ancient Persia to the ayatollahs of Shiite Iran, and from Amalek of Exodus to the anti-Jewish and anti-Israel wildly woke intelligentsia (so-called) of today's Western world – there is an engaged and concerned God. And he acts to protect the Jewish people, especially when we screw up.

The grand sweep of Jewish history is a sustained tutorial against the evils of brutal dictatorships, totalitarian regimes, and arrogant empires. From the oppression implied in the Tower of Babel story to the slavery of pharaonic Egypt, and from Achashverosh to Nebuchadnezzar, the Bible critiques the politics of absolute power and the penchant of dictators to lord over the Jewish people.

None of these empires lasted too long. And none of these bad actors were able to destroy the physical core and indomitable spirit of the Jewish people.

I see this as a warning to the Islamic Republic of Iran – the most acute wannabe totalitarian hegemon of our times; and to the United Nations or the United States of America – who seek to dictate diplomatically to the modern State of Israel. You cannot succeed!

Concurrently this is a message of reassurance to Jews and Israelis as to how we must view our challenges. The ambitions of Iran to global Islamic empire are ephemeral, and so are the pretensions to power of extreme "progressives" in red-green intersectional alliances who are currently savaging Israel. They will not prevail.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote that "Judaism is the unique attempt to endow events with meaning, and to see in the chronicles of mankind something more than a mere succession of happenings – to see them as nothing less than a drama of redemption in which the fate of a nation reflects its loyalty or otherwise to a covenant with God."

Thus, Jews and Israelis should understand their current strategic straights as ordained trials meant to be tackled with wisdom and bravery, even defiance. We can and should confront the current attacks with confidence in the power of Jewish history.

We should go forward in the knowledge that the Jewish people and the State of Israel are not alone, even though it certainly feels so at the current moment. As Rabbi Yehoshua Weitzman of the Galilee has taught (with his phrase becoming the key line of a currently popular Israeli song): "The eternal people is not afraid of long journeys."

As for the current moment, it indeed seems, alas, that Israel's leaders need to take a strong dose of defiance with their morning coffee. The world seems hell-bent on emasculating Israel, of preventing Israel from achieving its necessary and justified war goals of crushing Hamas and restoring Israel's regional deterrent power.

The emasculation begins with "small" matters like insisting that Israel's "primary goal" must be provision of humanitarian aid to an enemy population in wartime, which is an absurdity never broached before in the history of wars.

It continues with deference to the evil regime in Qatar which bankrolls and fronts for Hamas. Unbelievably, Washington is now thinking of contracting-out construction and operation of its new humanitarian aid port pier in Gaza to a Qatari company. (Then Iranian and Turkish ships can dock and deliver "aid," i.e., weapons and terror tunnel rebuilding supplies, to Hamas freely.)

It continues further with American and European insistence that the necessary next stage of the Israeli military campaign to rout out Hamas, in Rafah and the Philadelphi Corridor, is "unacceptable," a "red line that must not be crossed." The Biden administration, in particular, outrageously thinks that it can micromanage IDF operations from now on, house-by-house, bullet-by-bullet; handcuffing Israel and driving it into another disastrous draw against Hamas.

The debilitation of Israel continues yet still with arrogant talk of unilaterally recognizing Palestinian statehood and anointing the duplicitous and decrepit Palestinian Authority as a stabilizing force in Gaza – insane, immoral ideas that seed the likelihood of long-term strategic defeat for Israel.

Then there is the new threat of denying arms and munitions to Israel, from spare jet parts to artillery shells. Canada owns the shame of being the first Western country to explicitly declare such a boycott even as Israel fights for its life against a clearly genocidal enemy (Hamas) and prepares to take on yet another (Hezbollah).

The Washington of Joe Biden and Anthony Blinken (and Chuck Shumer, oy) seems to be not too far away from this too, although its arms chokehold on Israel is at the moment more subtle and implicit than public.

And on a broader level, Washington is kowtowing yet again to Iran, unlocking last week upwards of $10 billion in frozen funds for the ayatollahs. This is an Obama administration reflex deeply embedded in Biden's team that still seeks a grand regional deal with Teheran at Israel's expense (and that of Israel's Gulf Arab allies).

Instead of seriously striking at Iran and its proxies (like the Houthis) and countering the IRGC-controlled Shiite crescent running from the Arabian ("Persian") Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea, or doing anything substantial to halt Iran's race to nuclear weapons, the Biden administration seems obsessed with thwarting the supposedly malign influence and hegemonic ambitions – of Israel.

In the face of these deleterious developments, Israel obviously must continue to dialogue with leaders in Western capitals to reach understandings where possible, but also be prepared to defy them when necessary.

Finishing off Hamas and maintaining long-term control of a security envelope

including Judea, Samaria, and Gaza is an essential goal that justifies Israeli defiance of the world. The State of Israel does not shrink from long and knotty journeys.

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