

WALLS AND BOUNDARIES IN RABBINIC-BIBLICAL FOREIGN POLICY: A PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS*

Kalman J. Kaplan and Matthew B. Schwartz

This essay extends an interpersonal model to rabbinic interpretation of biblical foreign policy. Specifically, a wall-boundary analysis is made of ancient Israel's relation to four categories of nations: (a) Amalek and the Canaanites, (b) Ammon and Moab, (c) Edom and Egypt, and (d) the other nations. King Saul's counternormative behavior is discussed toward (a) King Agag of Amalek and (b) the Hebrew priests of God at Nob. Wall permeability becomes normative with an unassaulted inner boundary. When the boundary is under assault, however, wall permeability is expressly forbidden.

In a paper published in 1983 (Kaplan and Markus-Kaplan, 1983), the senior author attempted to apply a bidimensional model of interpersonal relations to a developmental understanding of the modern conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors. The present essay attempts to extend this analysis backwards to biblical times. Here we apply this same psychosocial model to an understanding of the relations between Israel and its neighbors as expressed in rabbinic interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jewish Political Studies Review 10:1-2 (Spring 1998)

Attachment and Individuation: A Distinction between Walls and Boundaries

The concepts in this essay rest to a large degree on the famous work of Otto Rank regarding birth trauma (Rank 1936) and on more recent work on attachment (Ainsworth 1979) and on individuation (Mahler, Pine and Bergman 1975). In this work, Rank distinguishes between two primal fears: (a) fear of absorption and (b) fear of abandonment. The fear of absorption or "death fear" is what must propel the fetus out of his secure home in his mother's womb into the strange outside environment. Emergence into this hostile environment, however, evokes the infant's fear of abandonment or "life fear." Thus, the baby's wail upon birth! These two fears are separate yet linked. The lack of a secure identity is, of course, related to fear of absorption. Yet it is the fear of abandonment which may block the very emergence of this secure identity.

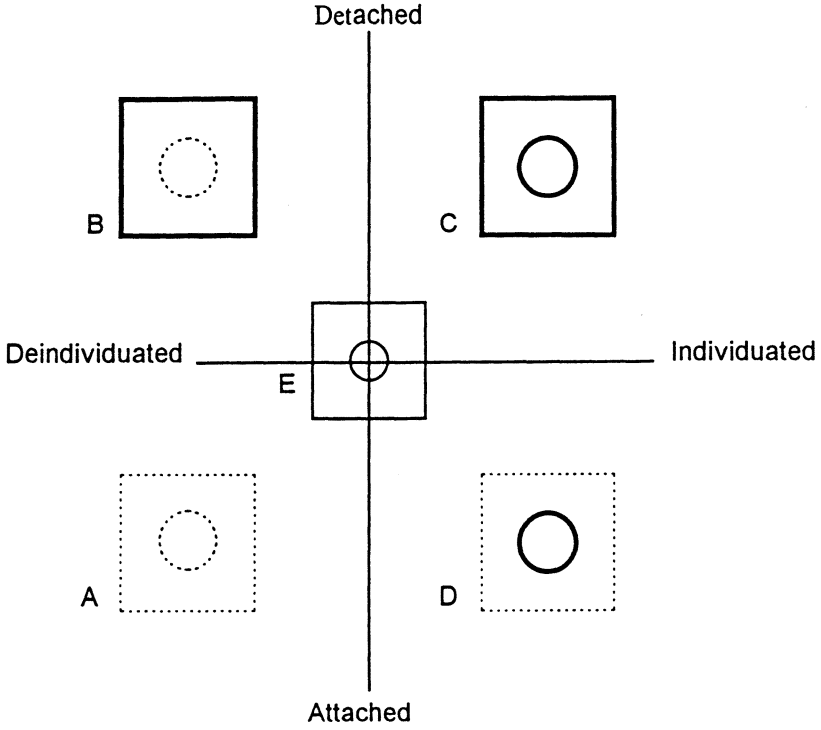
Figure 1 puts this a slightly different way for schematic purposes. An entity such as an individual or a nation may be defined simultaneously in terms of an intra-entity boundary and an inter-entity wall. Boundaries denote "inner entity strengths" or "degree of individuation" and are denoted by a circle icon. An entity may be portrayed as possessing an articulated or firm boundary (O), a moderate boundary (◊) or an unarticulated or weak boundary (⊙). Walls, in contrast denote "outer entity defenses" or "degree of attachment" and are denoted by a square icon. The same entity may have a permeable or porous wall (◻), a moderate wall (□) or an impermeable or rigid wall (■).

Two axes may be distinguished in Figure 1: a developmental BED axis and a clinical AC axis. Let us consider the developmental axis first. Position B represents an entity which is vulnerable and under attack (⊙). An impermeable wall (■) is essential to shield the entity from external engulfment. In Position E, the entity is slowly maturing. It is less vulnerable in its inner core (O) and can afford to have a more permeable defense (◻). Position D represents a secure entity (O). Here the entity can survive with a flexible impermeable wall (◻). The logic of this developmental axis is simply that the loosening of an entity's defenses (i.e., greater wall permeability) cannot be judged either as beneficial or deleterious in itself. It must occur in coordination with the strengthening (i.e., greater articulation) of its inner boundary.

It is the lack of this coordination (i.e., the bad fit between boundary articulation and wall permeability) that defines the clinical AC axis. An A entity relaxes its walls prematurely. It becomes

Figure 1

A BIDIMENSIONAL REPRESENTATION OF DISTANCING TYPES



- | | |
|---------------|-------------------|
| Rigid Wall | Firm Boundary |
| Moderate Wall | Moderate Boundary |
| Porous Wall | Weak Boundary |

overly attached (◻) to the surrounding world before it has sufficiently differentiated itself (⊙). It thus runs the risk of being overwhelmed, absorbed and enmeshed. An entity in the C position represents the polar opposite in that it prolongs the maintenance of nonpermeable walls. It maintains a rigid defensive structure (◻) even when its boundary has sufficiently differentiated (O). The C entity runs the risk of being isolated, unresponsive and disengaged.

An everyday medical analogy comes to mind. Removing a bandage from a wound before it has healed is counter-productive as it introduces outside contaminants and the possibility of infection. Leaving the bandage on too long is equally unwise as it serves to block the air necessary to complete the healing process, introducing the possibility of festering. What is healthy is removing the bandage at the developmentally correct time — after the possibility of infection and before that of festering. We now turn to an examination of these concepts in biblical and rabbinic thought on ancient Israel's dealings with the surrounding nations.

Normative Policy: Four Deuteronomic Categories

The Book of Deuteronomy as mediated through rabbinic thought offered guidelines to the Israelite nation on dealing with other peoples. It must be emphasized that this policy of foreign relations derives from one fundamental idea — that God created the world, rules it and can give portions of it to whom he pleases. Thus, a declaration of war in rabbinic law must be in response to divine command and not to any other perceived need. This is obligatory and not a matter of choice. No other motivation is acceptable. Human diplomacy may not seek any substitute for this command. Besides wars specifically commanded by God and necessary defensive actions, no war may be undertaken without the expressed consent of God himself, transmitting his message on the breastplate of the high priest, and the consent also of the earthly high court (BT Sanh. 2a and 20b; Maimonides, *Yad: Kings* 6:2).

Based on the Bible's own delineations, we can distinguish four categories of nations. In each category the policy develops in response to that nation's treatment of the Israelites during an exceptionally vulnerable period in Israelite history: the experience in Pharaonic Egypt and their subsequent wanderings in the Sinai Desert. This is a period when the Israelite boundaries were in a formative stage, and we may think of it as analogous to the vulnerable years of an individual's early childhood.

The normative policy is summarized in Table 1 and fits the BED axis described previously. The essential point of this policy is that an impermeable wall is not generally good or bad in itself but must be judged in conjunction with the threat the outside nation represents to one's inner boundary. Treatment experienced by the Israelites during the vulnerable period in Egypt and in the desert is especially diagnostic in this regard. Firm and impermeable walls must be erected and maintained against a nation presenting a boundary-devastating threat. This represents Position B. Less firm and more permeable walls are sufficient against a less all-encompassing threat — Position E. Finally, Position D describes the most relaxed and permeable wall state. It is appropriate when the outside nation does not represent any specific threat to the Israelite boundary.

I. Policy Toward Amalek and the Seven Canaanite Nations (Position B)

Foreign Policy I (Position B) is the most severe. It is prescribed towards Amalek and the seven Canaanite nations: the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites and Girgashites. Amalek attacked the Israelites in the desert only a few weeks after the exodus from Egypt. Moses sent Joshua with armed men to fight them. The Israelites, with the help of Moses' prayers drove off their attackers. God then commands the Hebrews that after they settle in Canaan they must destroy Amalek totally, all the people and all their possessions.

Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim....And the Lord said unto Moses: "Write this for a memorial in the book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven" (Ex. 17:8f).

Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way as ye came forth out of Egypt....Therefore it shall be...that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget (Deut. 25:17f).

Rabbinic law offers two explanations for this harsh policy: (1) Amalek was the only nation of whom Scripture states that "they did not fear God" (Deut. 25:17-19 with Sifre; Maimonides, *Yad: Kings* 5:5). (2) The wondrous events of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt had overwhelmed the surrounding peoples with awe, "The peoples have heard, they tremble" (Ex. 15:14f). Paying no regard to this

Table 1

NORMATIVE FOREIGN POLICY

Nation Group	Actions toward Israelites	God's Command to Israelites
I. Amalekites	(B) Amalekites attacked Israelites when they came out of Egypt (Ex. 15:14f, 17:8f; Deut. 25:17f)	Destroy Amalekites (Deut. 25:17f) But they can reject Amalekite ways (Maim. Yad: Kings 6:1f)
Seven Canaanite Nations	(B) Canaanites were immoral (Lev. 18:24f; Gen. 15:13-16) They might corrupt Israelites (Deut. 20:16-18)	Destroy Canaanites (Deut. 20:16-18) Expel Canaanites (Lev. 18:24f) They can live in peace under Noahide Law (Lev. 18:24f)
II. Amnon and Moab	(E1) Men didn't come out with food and drink (Deut. 23:4-7) Men hired Balaam to curse Israelites (Deut. 23:4-7) and Midianite women to corrupt them (Num. 31:16)	Don't attack their lands (Deut. 2:9, 2:19) Males can't convert (Deut. 23:4-7)
III. Edom	(E2) There have been times of peace and friendship with Edom (Gen. 33) However sometimes it acts unbrotherly (Gen. 27-41; Amos 1:9)	Don't abhor them but they can't convert until the third generation (Deut. 23:8-9)
Egypt	(E2) Egypt gave us shelter (Gen. 41:39f, 45; Deut. 3:8) Egypt held us in past bondage (Ex. 1:8-11, 13-22, 5:1-2, 14:30, 15:19)	Don't abhor them but they can't convert until the third generation (Deut. 23:8-9)
IV. The Other Nations	(D) No specific action	Peace is offered first; if not accepted, war (Deut. 20: 10f)

widespread recognition and acceptance of divine power, Amalek attacked the Israelites (Rashi on Ex. 17:14f). Although Amalek was defeated, the moment of awe passed and the world sank back into its old rut (Leibowitz 1980, 250-256).

God commands the Israelites to destroy Amalek totally once the Israelites settle in their own land. This was, in one sense, God's own war with Amalek in which the Israelites act only as His representatives. Militarily, Amalek was no greater threat to the nation of Israel than other neighbors around. What God wished to accomplish was not merely the weakening of a military threat but the destruction of a nation whose essence He condemned as grossly wicked and immoral and which constituted an extreme threat to the Israelite inner self (the boundary). The destruction of Amalek must be complete. A totally impermeable wall must be erected against them taking the extreme form of an aggressive foreign policy of annihilation. There is no possibility of coexistence. At the same time, if any Amalekites wished to reject their Amalekite ways, to accept the Noahide laws and to live at peace with the Hebrews, they were to be permitted to do this (Maimonides, *Yad: Kings* 6:1f; *Lehem Mishna* cites various opinions on this topic).

The seven Canaanite nations are in a similar category. They are described as having filled Canaan with idolatry and immoralities such as child sacrifice and temple prostitution, activities especially offensive in the sacred atmosphere of the Holy Land and absolutely forbidden to the Israelites. Because of this they have been "vomited out" by the land. If the Israelites engage in any of these abominations, they too will be "vomited out."

Ye therefore shall keep My statutes and Mine ordinances, and shall not do any of these abominations; neither the home-born, nor the stranger that sojourneth among you... that the land vomit not you out also, when ye defile it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you (*Lev. 18:24f*).

Rabbinic commentary is very emphatic in its emphasis on the special sanctity of the Holy Land. Especially uplifting behavior is required from the people who live in it (Nachmanides on *Lev. 18:25*). The Canaanite nations threaten the inner core of Israelite life and they too must be walled off by totally impermeable walls. Their ways are not to be tolerated in the Holy Land nor are the Israelites to be influenced by them.

Howbeit of the cities of these peoples, that the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that

breatheth, but thou shalt utterly destroy them:...that they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods, and so ye sin against the Lord your God (Deut. 20:16-18).

Joshua's behavior when he enters the Land of Israel is revealing in this regard (Book of Joshua). According to the Jerusalem Talmud, he offers three alternatives to the inhabitants. They can make peace, agreeing to live under the Noahide laws, they can fight or they can flee (JT Sheviit 6:1). The Gergashites, in fact, do leave. In other words, despite the general injunction on the Israelites to see the Canaanites as a devastating and corrupting threat, they can be tolerated if they give up their corrupting ways.

Category I thus consists of nations whose actions are thoroughly corrupted and dangerous and whose very existence in their original form constitutes a threat to the higher ways of a biblically-centered society which was expected to be close to God. Policy I is aimed at not merely defending against a potential military threat but at the complete obliteration of an assault on the Israelite inner core. Totally impermeable walls must be erected and maintained with Amalek and the Canaanite nations to preserve the Israelites' threatened inner boundary. As such, it represents a B position.

II. Policy toward Ammon and Moab (Position E1)

Foreign Policy II (Position E1) is directed toward the nations of Ammon and Moab. It is somewhat less severe than Policy I. On the one hand, Ammon and Moab are not described as not fearing God (as is Amalek), nor do they reside in the more morally demanding atmosphere of the Holy Land (as do the Canaanites). Therefore the prescribed Israelite response is somewhat more relaxed than that of Policy I. Ammon and Moab are not to be harassed or attacked, except as a preventive defensive measure. God has given them their lands as their own inheritance.

And the Lord said unto me: "Be not at enmity with Moab, neither contend with them in battle; for I will not give thee of his land for a possession; because I have given Ar unto the children of Lot for a possession" (Deut. 2:9).

And when thou comest nigh over against the children of Ammon, harass them not, nor contend with them; for I will not give thee of the land of the children of Ammon for a possession;

because I have given it unto the children of Lot for a possession (Deut. 2:19).

On the other hand, the two nations have acted badly in several matters. They did not offer food and water to the Israelites in the desert, they hired Balaam, a Mesopotamian prophet, to curse the Israelites (Num. 22-24) and on Balaam's advice they hired Midianite women to lure the Hebrews into dissipation and idolatry (Num. 31:16; BT Sanh 106a). Thus they sought to attack the Hebrews not by war, as did Egypt and Edom, but by the weakening of their religious moral character and their very identity as a God-fearing people. The moral attack was considered a far greater sin than the simple physical attack (Sifre on 23:9; Rashi on Deut. 23:9). Biblical law must of necessity make note of such an attack and indeed forbid that these peoples ever in any serious way be joined to the sacred purposes of the People of the Book. Thus, the Moabites and the Ammonites are never to be allowed to join the Israelite nation and faith.

An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation shall none of them enter into the assembly of the Lord for ever; because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Aramnaharaim, to curse thee (Deut. 23:4-7).

In our terms, the maintenance of a moderately impermeable wall is still necessary to preserve a somewhat still fragile Israelite boundary. This has been described as an E1 position.

However, in a strange twist, a deeper reading of the biblical text led the rabbis of the Talmud to conclude that it is only the men of these two nations who are forbidden conversion and not the women. "Ammonite but not Ammonitess, Moabite but not Moabitess" (Yebamot 76b based on Deut. 23:4-7). A rabbinic interpretation of these passages (M.L. Malbim on Deut. 23) seems to suit well our wall-boundary analysis. The Ammonites and the Moabites were descended, argued the rabbis, from the union between Lot and his two daughters after they had fled the destruction of Sodom (Gen. 19). Lot himself, separating from Abraham, his uncle, had earlier gone to live in the city of Sodom and had sunk deeply into its depraved materialism and sensuality. However, his two daughters, although living in Sodom, had continued to behave in a decent moral way (Gen. 19:8).

The vast differences in behavior between the men and women of Ammon and Moab continued through the years. It was the men's

obligation to come out to welcome the Hebrews with food and water and they did not. It was the men who hired Balaam to curse the Israelites. When that failed it was the men who, on Balaam's advice, hired Midianite women to lure the Hebrews into dissipation and idolatry. Thus a moderately impermeable wall must be maintained against the men of Ammon and Moab so that the still somewhat fragile inner boundary of the Israelites' being may be sheltered from harm.

On the other hand, the women of Ammon and Moab had not lost their sense of proper modesty and had not participated either in the refusal of hospitality to the Hebrews in the desert or in the schemes of Balaam. They threaten no harm and thus no wall is needed to keep them away from the Hebrew community. Ruth (Book of Ruth) and Naamah (I Kings 14:21), two biblical figures distinguished in their kindness and modesty, are both from these peoples. Ruth, a Moabitess, represents an epitome of loyalty to her mother-in-law Naomi and, indeed, is an ancestress of King David. Naamah (an Ammonitess) is wife of King Solomon and the mother of King Rehoboam of Judah.

III. Policy toward Edom and Egypt (Position E2)

Foreign Policy III (Position E2) is directed toward Edom and Egypt. Both these nations are described as having ambivalent patterns of relationships with the Israelites. The Edomites are descended from Esau (Gen. 36:1), the brother of Jacob, who is the ancestor of the Israelites, and Deuteronomy refers to the Edomites as brothers of the Israelites (Deut. 23:8). There were times of peace and friendship.

And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men....And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and they wept (Gen. 33).

However, sometimes the brotherly relationship was overwhelmed by feelings of bitter hatred.

And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him. And Esau said in his heart: "Let the days of mourning for my father be at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob" (Gen. 27:41).

This the Lord cannot forget.

Thus saith the Lord: "For three transgressions of Edom, Yea, for four, I will not reverse it: Because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity" (Amos 1:9-11).

Egypt also shows a mixed behavior pattern. They were kind and nurturant to the Hebrews when they came to Egypt during the famine.

And Pharaoh said unto Joseph:...*"take your father and your households, and come unto me; and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the land"* (Gen. 45).

Also they have displayed respect for wisdom, producing not only their own great culture but giving recognition to a foreign wise man like Joseph, placing him in a high position in their government.

And Pharaoh said unto Joseph: *"Forasmuch as God hath shown all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou"....And Pharaoh said unto Joseph: "See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt"* (Gen. 41:39f).

Later, however, a new Pharaoh came to power in Egypt who was less friendly to the Israelites. He enslaved the Israelites and ordered the killing of their male children until finally God himself intervenes and leads the Israelites out of Egypt.

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who knew not Joseph....Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens (Ex. 1:8-11).

And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying: *"Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive"* (Ex. 1:13-22).

The next fifteen chapters of Exodus describe at length the waverings of Pharaoh in regard to letting the Israelites go. It culminates in the final destruction of the forces of Pharaoh in the Red Sea and the freeing of the Israelites from Egyptian hands (Ex. 14 and 15).

The inner nucleus of Israelite identity is not greatly threatened by Edom or Egypt. As the great eleventh century rabbinic commentator Rashi points out, the threat posed by Ammon and Moab was more serious since they aimed at destroying the inner soul of the Israelites whereas Edom and Egypt attacked only their bodily safety and not

their inner creative life (Rashi on Deut. 23:9). The third prescribed foreign policy (Foreign Policy III) is therefore more relaxed than those discussed previously. A moderately permeable wall is sufficient because the Israelite inner boundary is not fundamentally threatened.

The Israelites are commanded not to attack or even abhor the people of Edom or Egypt.

Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite, for he is thy brother. Thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian, because thou wast a stranger in his land (Deut. 23:8).

Further, converts to Judaism from both peoples, men and women, are accepted, although only after the third generation.

The children of the third generation that are born unto them may enter into the assembly of the Lord" (Deut. 23:9).

They still need a proving period before they may be accepted as part of the Israelite nation. The policy represents position E2.

IV. Policy toward the Other Nations (Position D)

Foreign Policy IV (Position D) describes a number of connections between the Israelites and the other nations. These nations include, among others, Aram, Babylonia, Tyre, and the Philistines. None of these touched the Israelites during their trek in the desert. Each situation was dealt with as it arose, based always on the biblical view that direction of a foreign policy must be first and foremost determined by what God wanted Israel to do. Peace, in general, was preferred to war but not unless the situation was suited to peace.

When thou drawest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that are found therein shall become tributary unto thee, and shall serve thee. And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it (Deut. 20:10f).

Rabbinic commentary is quite clear on this point. If a war is not obligatory, peace must be offered. It is up to the other nation whether to accept or reject it (Rashi on Deut. 23:10).

Our psychological analysis follows the same basic thrust. If the Israelite self-definition is not threatened (the inner boundary is secure), there is no reason to erect or maintain an inflexible defense (the wall can become fully permeable). The nations are not to be attacked nor are they to be denied conversion to Judaism if they so desire. This represents position D in our previously described model.

Counternormative Behavior: The Two Cases of King Saul

The Talmud consistently regarded King Saul as a man of great stature, the anointed of the Lord. Yet, despite an early promise of greatness, his reign was marked by tragedy ending with his suicide during a losing battle against the Philistines (I Sam. 31). Specifically, Saul is responsible for two major policy decisions which exemplify well a policy counternormative to the Deuteronomic framework discussed above. In the first case, King Saul provokes God's rejection of his kingship over Israel because in his attack on Amalek he failed to destroy all the livestock and spared also the life of King Agag (I Sam. 15). In the second case, Saul orders the murder of the priests of Nob because he accuses them of siding with the innocent David, the newly anointed one of God, in his flight from Saul's wrath (I Sam. 22). In neither situation does Saul's response fit the precipitating event. In both cases, God strongly disapproved of his actions. In fact, the two decisions can be seen as polarities on the counternormative AC axis. In the first case, Saul places himself in an A position. He does not maintain a sufficiently impermeable and actively defensive wall against the very dangerous and aggressive King Agag. In the second case, King Saul sets up an overly impermeable and aggressive wall against the priests of God who have not harmed him. This places Saul in a C position. These two incidents are summarized in Table 2.

I. Saul's Behavior toward King Agag of Amalek (Position A)

Saul's kingship emerges against Samuel's advice. The Israelites clamor for a "king to judge us like all the nations" (I Sam. 8:5). Samuel attempts to dissuade them by pointing to all the arbitrary and capricious ways this king would exploit them. He would take their sons for his horsemen, captains, farmers and craftsmen, their

Table 2

SAUL'S COUNTERNORMATIVE BEHAVIOR

Group	Saul's Actions	God's Response
King Agag of Amalek	(A) Saul spares Agag and keeps the spoil he has been commanded to destroy (I Sam. 15:8-9)	God rejects Saul as King of Israel (I Sam. 15:17-23)
Priests of Nob (C)	Saul orders the killing of the priests of the Lord in Nob (I Sam. 22:11-19)	God departs from Saul and no longer answers him (I Sam. 28:6)

daughters for his perfumers, cooks and bakers, their fields and vineyards for his servants, their servants and asses for his work, their flocks for his profit and even themselves for his servants (I Sam. 8:10-19). Nevertheless, the Israelites remain insistent on a king and the Lord commands Samuel to "make them a king" (I Sam. 8:19-22). The Lord reveals to Samuel that Saul is to be this king (I Sam. 9:15-17) and Samuel anoints Saul (I Sam. 10:1). Despite Samuel's warnings, Saul proves a courageous and spiritually insightful king during the early part of his reign (I Sam. 10-14).

Saul's failure to obey God's command to "utterly destroy" Amalek provokes the divine rejection of Saul as king. This command has been specifically emphasized to him by Samuel.

And Samuel said unto Saul... "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep camel and ass" (I Sam. 15:1-3).

Saul attacked Amalek and won a punishing victory, but he failed to destroy them utterly, sparing both their king, Agag, and their best livestock.

But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, even the young of the second birth, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them (I Sam. 15:7-9).

God then reveals to Samuel that he is rejecting Saul's kingship because he has not fulfilled the divine intention of completely obliterating the nefarious spiritual influence of Amalek. Samuel passes on this information to Saul.

And Samuel said [to Saul]:...“Because thou hast rejected the work of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king” (I Sam. 15:10-23).

Rabbinic commentaries seem to take these passages at face value (BT Yoma 22b).

Saul's behavior is counternormative (position A) to the Deuteronomic policy discussed above in that he has inappropriately and prematurely loosened the protective wall around the Israelites. Saul's kingship has been rejected because he has disobeyed God's command to utterly destroy Amalek (i.e., to maintain a firm wall) in the face of Amalek's ongoing threat to the Israelite boundary. He has underreacted to an ongoing threat. That Jewish thought continued to see the threat of Amalek as ongoing is reflected in the rabbinic interpretation of the evil Haman in the Book of Esther as a descendant of Amalek. “Saul did not kill Agag and from him was born Haman the tormenter of Israel” (BT Megillah 13a).

II. Saul's Behavior toward the Priests of Nob (Position C)

Saul's relationship with David is a difficult one from the start. God has rejected Saul's kingship because he has failed to utterly destroy Amalek. God then commands Samuel to stop mourning the rejected Saul (I Sam. 16:1) and to anoint David the son of Jesse as the future king (I Sam. 16:12). Although the Hebrew Bible initially portrays the young David as exemplary in his treatment of Saul (I Sam. 16-26), Saul from the first is described as terrified by “an evil spirit from the Lord” (I Sam. 16:14). This “evil spirit” temporarily departs but continuously reappears during the next ten chapters seemingly independent of David's actions (I Sam. 20:1). Nothing David does can allay Saul's fear that David is plotting against him. Ultimately Saul seeks to destroy David. He is pursuing him when he learns from Doeg the Edomite that the priests of Nob had given David bread and a sword and had consulted God for him. He confronts Ahimelech, a priest, and accuses the priests of Nob of conspiring against him.

And Saul said unto him [Ahimelech, the priest of Nob]: "Why have thou conspired against me, thou and the son of Jesse, in that thou hast given him bread, and a sword, and hast inquired of God for him, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait at this day" (I Sam. 22:13).

Ahimelech protests the innocence of the priests but Saul orders his servants to kill them. However, they refuse to kill "the priests of the Lord."

And the king said unto the guard that stood about him: "Turn, and slay the priests of the Lord; because their hand also is with David and because they knew that he fled, and did not disclose it to me." But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the Lord (I Sam. 22:14-17).

Saul then turns to the informer Doeg the Edomite who carries out the murderous job, killing not only the priests but all their livestock.

And the king said to Doeg: "Turn thou and fall upon the priests." And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and he slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod (I Sam. 22:18-19).

It is particularly noteworthy that Saul's excuse to Samuel for not fulfilling the command against Amalek was that he listened to the wishes of his people. At Nob, he has the priests killed, but against the wishes of his people. God now departs from Saul and will no longer answer him.

And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets (I Sam. 28:6).

Strikingly, David, too, is criticized for endangering the lives of the priests of Nob through his indiscreet interactions with them (BT Sanh. 106b, Yoma 22b).

Saul's handling of the incident at Nob is again counternormative (this time, position C) to the Deuteronomic policy discussed above. Here he has erected an unnecessary wall to protect himself against David who in fact is no threat to him. (Indeed David is married to Saul's daughter Michal. Future kings would still be grandsons of Saul.) In his unnecessary defense against the priests of Nob, Saul actually attacks the inner essence of his nation. Indeed, when his own servants refuse to do the job, he commands a man described as

an Edomite to murder the priests of the Lord. The unnecessary medicine he has taken has had potent side effects!

Significantly, this behavior represents the polar opposite of his earlier error in dealing with the Amalekites. There he has underreacted against a real threat. At Nob, he overreacts against the priests for helping David. The rabbis in the Talmud are very clear on this point. They describe a voice coming from heaven after the incident of Amalek, saying "Be not overly righteous." After the Nob incident, the voice again comes, saying "Be not overly wicked." One who pities the wicked will eventually be cruel when he should be merciful (BT Yoma 22b; Rosenberg 1976).

Summary

Our biblical model offers an insight into the ways that successful foreign policy can be conducted. A government must be aware of the need to maintain (1) an external defense (i.e., a wall) and also (2) the continuity of the inner life of the nation (i.e., a boundary). The truly great head of state or foreign minister must understand and respond to both needs. The value of a wall must be judged in the context of the degree of danger to the inner boundary. Saul twice errs in this estimate by following his own emotions rather than the divinely commanded foreign policy. First he underreacts (with Amalek) and then he overreacts (with the priests of Nob).

It is significant that two of history's greatest leaders showed the rabbinic-biblical sort of understanding in their speeches and actions — Pericles of ancient Athens and Abraham Lincoln in the United States. Both believed deeply in the high level of humanity and opportunity which their nations offered to the individual citizen. Pericles felt that Athens could win its war against the Peloponnesian allies as long as its people remained strong and active, no matter how much of its territory was ravaged. Lincoln, too, expressed several times in important speeches his deep almost mystical belief in the nobility and the uniqueness of the American experiment in government and he, too, was willing to fight to defend it. In a sense, this was a belief that these two men shared with the biblical approach to foreign policy as we have presented it.

References

- Ainsworth, M.D.S., 1979. "Infant-Mother Attachment," *American Psychologist*, 34:932-937.
- Babylonian Talmud*, 1975. New York: Rom Edition.
- The Holy Scriptures*, 1955. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America.
- Jerusalem Talmud*, 1866. New York: Krotoschin Edition.
- Kaplan, K.J. and Markus-Kaplan, M., 1983. "Walls and Boundaries in Arab Relations with Israel: Interpersonal Distancing Model," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 27:457-472.
- Lehem, Mishna, 1956. *Gloss on Maimonides*. New York: S. Goldman.
- Leibowitz, N., 1980. *Studies in Devarim*. Jerusalem: Ahva Press.
- Mahler, M.S., Pine, F., and Bergman, A., 1975. *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant*. New York: Basic Books.
- Maimonides, 1956. *Yad Hahazakah*. New York: S. Goldman.
- Malbim, M.L., 1957. *Ha Torah Veba Mitzva* and *Sifre*. Jerusalem: Pardes.
- Midrash Deuteronomy Rabbah*, 1961. Jerusalem: Vilna Edition.
- Nachmanides, 1959. *Perushe HaTorah*. Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook.
- Rank, O., 1936. *Will Therapy*. New York: Knopf.
- Rashi, 1978. *Commentary*. New York: Shulinger Brothers.
- Samuel I*, 1976. A.J. Rosenberg, ed. New York: Judaica Press.

Note

* This article was presented as a paper at the Thirteenth Annual Meetings of the International Society for Political Psychology, Washington, D.C., July 1990.