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ISRAEL AND SAMSON: SOME TENUOUSLY BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS ON STRATEGY

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Israel may learn from Samson, not to "die with the Philistines," but to live despite its enemies. How is this possible? The biblical Samson, blinded but not powerless, could destroy the Philistines only by inflicting his own death. And Israel is not blind, nor is it powerful in the sense of a physical strength born of religious faith joined with desperation. What, then, is there for Israel to learn from this hero of the post-pentateuchal Book of Judges?

Taking Hold of the Temple Pillars

First, Israel can learn that it must prepare to take hold of the enemy temple pillars, not because "last resort" options are of overriding importance in themselves (they are not of such importance), but because preparations for such options could make last resort scenarios for Jerusalem less likely. By taking steps to "die with the Philistines," Israel would do far more than prepare for the Apocalypse.

Enhancing Israel's nuclear deterrence, preemption and warfighting capabilities could even push away the Final Battle, preserving the Jewish state by demonstrating both national power and resolve.

Regarding prospective contributions to Israeli nuclear deterrence, preparations for a Samson Option could help convince would-be attackers that aggression would not prove gainful. This is especially the case if Israeli preparations were coupled with some level of nuclear disclosure, and if Israel's pertinent Samson weapons appeared to be sufficiently invulnerable to enemy first-strikes. In view of what strategists sometimes refer to as the "rationality of pretended irrationality," Samson could also aid Israeli nuclear deterrence by demonstrating a willingness to take existential risks, but this would hold only if last-resort options were not tied definitionally to certain destruction.

Regarding prospective contributions to preemp-

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tion, preparations for a Samson Option could convince Israel that essential defensive first-strikes would be undertaken with diminished expectations of unacceptably destructive enemy retaliations. This would depend, of course, upon antecedent Israeli decisions on disclosure, on Israeli perceptions of the effects of disclosure on enemy retaliatory prospects, and on Israeli judgments about enemy perceptions of Samson weapons vulnerability. As in the case of Samson and Israeli nuclear deterrence, last-resort preparations could assist Israel's preemption options by displaying a willingness to take certain existential risks. But Israeli planners must be mindful here of pretended irrationality as a double-edged sword. Brandished too "irrationally," Israeli preparations for a Samson Option could even encourage enemy preemptions.

Regarding prospective contributions to Israel's nuclear warfighting options, preparations for a Samson Option could convince enemy states that a clear victory would be impossible to achieve; that is, that even after overwhelming the Jewish state and its military forces, these states would face their own overwhelming destruction. But here it would be important for Israel to communicate to potential aggressors the following understanding: Israel's "Samson" weapons are additional to (not at the expense of) its warfighting weapons. In the absence of such communication, preparations for a Samson Option could effectively impair rather than reinforce Israel's nuclear warfighting options.

The Source of Israel's National Power

Second, Israel can learn from Samson the mortal dangers of exploited vulnerabilities. Like Samson, the Jewish state possesses great strength. And like Samson, this strength can be blunted or even be "cut off" altogether. Israel's national power, of course, does not lie in any one single part of its "anatomy," but its constituent elements are vulnerable nonetheless. These elements can be rendered inoperable.

What, then, is the "lesson" here from Samson? More than anything else, it is that Israel draws its power from the land, from the essential strategic depth provided by Judea, Samaria and the Golan, and from the territorial imperative to secure conventional and unconventional retaliatory forces from enemy first-strikes. In the absence of secure retaliatory forces, Israel's deterrence posture could be eroded to intolerable limits.

It follows that Israel's current policy of incremental territorial concessions — a policy that flows from a misguided conception of the peace process — is a policy that will destroy Israel's power. A policy that elimi-

nates strategic depth and prevents secure retaliatory forces will strongly encourage large-scale enemy aggressions against Israel, both conventional and unconventional. It is a policy, therefore, that ignores an important lesson from Samson.

Should Israel choose, instead, to learn from Samson, it will strenuously guard its sources of power. Rather than accepting further excisions of its already attenuated land mass, an acceptance that would impair strategic depth to an unmanageable degree and encourage enemy "preemptive" strikes, it will insist upon no additional territorial concessions. Recognizing that international law is not a suicide pact, its leaders will acknowledge forthrightly that Israel has a primary obligation to survive, an obligation owed to both its current citizens and to those earlier generations of Jewish victims who now sleep in the dust.

Israel must not be ashamed of its own power. Nor must it continue to project its own reasonable intentions upon enemy leaderships. Recalling from Samson the terrible consequences of powerlessness — consequences brought on not by irresistible external forces but by Samson's own foolishness and misjudgments — leaders of the Jewish state must now preserve and prepare to use all vital elements of national power. In military terms, these elements include indispensable land mass and appropriate forms of nuclear weaponry.

Arab Momentum Increases Israel's Nuclear Dependence

Should Israel's ongoing surrender of land mass lead to creation of a Palestinian state, a clear loss of geo-strategic power would be exacerbated by a less tangible, but no less important, power loss. I refer to the loss attendant upon the probable Arab and Iranian perception of an incessant and now unstoppable momentum against the Jewish state, a *jihad*-centered perception of military inevitability that might not represent a measurable loss of power but that would nonetheless reinforce and reiterate enemy advantages. Recognizing such perceptions, Israel could decide to take its bomb out of the "basement" (as a deterrence-enhancing measure) and/or it could accept a greater willingness to launch preemptive strikes against enemy hard targets. Made aware of such Israeli reactions, reactions that would stem from both Israel's territorial vulnerabilities and from Israel's awareness of enemy perceptions spawned by the creation of Palestine, Arab states and/or Iran could respond in more-or-less parallel fashion, preparing more openly for nuclearization and for first-strike attacks. Such results of the Peace Process would almost certainly increase Israel's overall dependence upon nuclear

weapons and nuclear strategy.

Such dependence, more than likely, would focus upon the requirements of nuclear warfighting. This is the case because the Peace Process will enlarge Israel's needs for nuclear weapons to fulfill deterrence and preemption options, and because these options might not be fulfilled successfully. That is, deterrence and preemption strategies could fail, even though they had been supported by nuclear weapons. Here, Israel's continued survival could then require the weapons and tactics needed for nuclear warfighting, a requirement which, by definition, would represent a diminution of Israel's power.

Why Israel Needs Nuclear Weapons for Preemption Purposes

To maintain a viable power position in the Middle East, an obligation that may be learned from Samson, Israel must maintain at all times the preemption option. But as this option would be undermined by this particular Peace Process (Israel, after all, would be generally identified as the "aggressor" should it preempt while "peace" were in the process of being negotiated), that Process impairs such maintenance. It follows that Israel, still learning from Samson, should hold on to its essential sources of power by rejecting this kind of Peace Process and by simultaneously protecting the nuclear weapons needed for supporting the preemption option.

Why are nuclear weapons needed for such support? Three general answers come to mind. Israel needs nuclear weapons to preempt enemy nuclear attacks. This does not mean that Israeli preemptions of such attacks would necessarily be nuclear (more than likely, they would, in fact, be nonnuclear), but only that they could be nuclear.

Israel needs nuclear weapons to support conventional preemptions against enemy nuclear or nonnuclear (conventional/chemical/biological) assets. With such weapons, Israel could maintain, explicitly or implicitly, a threat of nuclear counterretaliation. Without such weapons, Israel, having to rely entirely upon nonnuclear forces, might not be able to deter enemy retaliations for the Israeli preemptive strike.

Differing Orientations Toward Death

Third, Israel can learn from Samson that all world politics, and all global strategy, move in the midst of death. To truly understand calculations of war, deterrence, preemption and defense, Israel's leaders will need to understand (1) enemy orientations to death, both individual and collective; and (2) Israeli orientations

to death, both individual and collective. Faced with enemies for whom personal death would be not only acceptable but agreeable, Israel could discover that its deterrent had been immobilized and that Third Temple survival was now dependent upon some feasible configuration of preemption and active defenses.

Samson, we recall, ultimately faced death with resignation and some equanimity, but it was not his preferred option. Like Samson, Israel could conceivably reach a point where it would be willing to "die with the Philistines," but such a point, it is generally agreed, should be scrupulously avoided. Indeed, the Jewish state must now do everything within its power to avoid ever having to implement a Samson Option. For Israel, there can never be any intrinsic merit in death, either individual or collective.

Some of Israel's enemies, on the other hand, may operate with different preference orderings concerning life and death. If, for example, an Iranian *jihad* were contemplated against Israel, such a "holy war" could reflect fundamentally different orientations to personal and collective sacrifice. It is not even out of the question that a strongly fundamentalist leadership in Teheran ordering such a *jihad* could regard certain Israeli nuclear reprisals as tolerable or even desirable. Recognizing this prospect, possibly with the help of Samson, Israel could learn the limits of its nuclear deterrent before it is too late.

To a significant extent, the existential problems facing the State of Israel stem from human inclinations in enemy states to rebel against an unbearable truth. Desperate to live perpetually, various portions of humankind embrace an entire cornucopia of faiths that promise life everlasting in exchange for undying loyalty. In the end, such loyalty is transferred from faith to state, which then battles with other states in what political scientists and strategists mistakenly describe as a secular struggle for power, but which is sometimes much more.

Advantages to Imagining the End

Fourth, Israel can learn from Samson that there are advantages to concrete imaginings of catastrophe. For now, the Jewish state, it seems, can contemplate the end of the Third Temple every day, and yet can persevere quite calmly in its most routine and mundane affairs. This should not be the case if Israel could begin to contemplate the actual moment of its disappearance. Israel, therefore, should begin immediately to replace reassuringly abstract conceptualizations of End Times with unbearably precise images of horror.

Sapere aude! "Dare to know!" This Kantian motto

for the eighteenth century Enlightenment acquires special meaning in Israel's ongoing struggle to endure. Just as repression of the fear of death by individuals can occasion activities that impair the forces of self-preservation, so can Israel impair its opportunities for collective survival by denying the real possibility of Third Temple destruction.

Nowhere is it written that the Third Temple is forever. On the contrary, the State of Israel has never been as vulnerable to disappearance as it is at the present moment. Faced with an altogether unique combination of enemy capabilities and enemy intent, Jerusalem may now face a more immediate genocidal danger than that faced earlier by millions of individual European Jews. The Nazis, after all, were never capable of destroying several million lives in a fraction of a second, of wreaking megadeath without first acquiring bodily custody of victim populations.

There is more! In what surely must be the most terrible irony of all, Israel, as a solution to what Herzl called "The Jewish Question," has, by definition, made millions of Jews more vulnerable to genocidal assault. By being concentrated into a tiny area, these Jews (as well as hundreds of thousands of non-Jews living within the "green line") are now uniquely subject to mass murder. Once targeted by enemy ballistic missiles with unconventional warheads, these Jews would be subject to prompt annihilation in a manner that would certainly be *sui generis*.

This is not to suggest, by any means, that the Zionist solution to the Jewish Problem was a mistake. Quite the contrary! The establishment of the State of Israel was unambiguously correct and historically imperative. What I am urging here is that Israel now feel itself aware of the dimensions of the existential threat and of the steps needed to ensure physical survival. There are steps that can be taken — steps that would vindicate Israel's *raison d'être* — but these steps must not be taken lightly. This brings us back to the original point "made" by Samson, the obligation to go beyond analytically abstract and anesthetized conceptions of national disaster to fully concrete, flesh and blood images. For Israel, more than for any other state on Earth, the time for learned intellectual games is over. Learning from Samson, residents of the Jewish state must now feel (not merely know) that agony is infinitely more productive than syllogism, that unending despair is more revealing than the most subtle elucidation of strategic thought, and that tears always have deeper roots and explanatory benefits than smiles.

Israel, then, must step into death in order to prevent death. Such movement would not mean to draw a last

collective breath, but rather, to discover, in the immanent abyss of death, the course of direction toward life. Drawing from the revelation of death's immanence in the life of every nation, the People of Israel could nurture the felt agony that is now necessarily antecedent to national survival.

Healthy, "normal" states can never "experience" such "felt agony." These states take national survival as altogether given, as something absolutely independent from "death." Objectifying death as a reality transcending national life, these states forget that life is inevitably death's prisoner. Although such forgetting has obvious short-term benefits, it does interfere with prudential forms of long-term collective life-support.

Israel cannot afford to be a "normal" state. It must, instead, feel that national survival is problematic, that collective extinction represents the end point of the same continuum that contains collective vitality, and that survival as a state cannot be detached from informed premonitions of disappearance. As a practical matter, Israel's essential presentiments of death are apt to appear only when life in the Jewish state is shaken to its very foundations. This means, in another ironic turn of reasoning, that Israel's required nurturance of unbearably precise images of national life will be contingent upon coming still closer to national destruction. In this connection, however, there is a great danger that Israel will wait too long, that it will come so close to the edge of the cliff that it will no longer be capable of pulling back.

Dangers in Hoping Too Much

Fifth, Israel can learn from Samson that there are dangers in hoping, in always hoping too much. Mistakes can bring death, both individual and collective. Writing of the Jews as a "people of solitaires," E.M. Cioran, the most dazzling and devastating French philosophical voice since Paul Valéry, observes of the Jewish "nation" that this people, "...unsuited to the complacencies of despair, bypassing its age-old fatigue and the conclusions imposed by fate, lives in the delirium of expectation, determined not to learn a lesson from its humiliations...."

Such determination must come to an end. To learn from its "humiliations," and therefore from Samson, Israel must acknowledge, quickly and forthrightly, that its enemies are doctrinally committed to destruction of the Third Commonwealth. Although, in Muslim parlance, all war dictated by the *shari'a* is necessarily "holy," the Arabic word *jihad* — which has the literal meaning of "effort," "striving," or "struggle" — should not be taken lightly. A basic commandment of Islam,

jihad is an obligation imposed on all Muslims by God, and is unambiguously military in intent.

Derived from the universality of Muslim revelation, *jihad* calls upon all those who have accepted God's message and God's word to strive (*jahada*) relentlessly to convert or, at a minimum, to subjugate those who have not converted. Significantly, for the State of Israel, this obligation is not bounded by limits of time or space. It must continue until the whole world has accepted Islam or has submitted to the power of the Islamic state.

What is the prevailing Islamic worldview in the interim? According to Bernard Lewis:

[T]he world is divided into two: the House of Islam (*dar al-Islam*), where Muslims rule and the law of Islam prevails; and the House of War (*dar al-Harb*), comprising the rest of the world. Between the two there is a morally necessary, legally and religiously obligatory state of war, until the final and inevitable triumph of Islam over unbelief. According to the law books, this state of war could be interrupted, when expedient, by an armistice or truce of limited duration. It could not be terminated by a peace, but only by a final victory.

A Gift to Israel's Enemies

Could anything be clearer? Throughout the Islamic world, Israel's current pleas for "peace" agreements are exploited eagerly by Israel's enemies. While Jerusalem believes that these incrementally-negotiated agreements point toward authentic and long-term solutions, the Arabs and Iran regard them as a temporary expedient, indeed as an extraordinary gift of the foolish "unbelievers" who will now help bring about their own divinely-ordained destruction. Of course, it is arguable that current Islamic states and movements are not animated by doctrine, and that the obligations of *jihad* are therefore extraneous to serious strategic calculation, but such argumentation would be altogether naive, and, again, a sign of wishful thinking.

For Islam, the unsubjected unbeliever — in our present concerns, the Jew — is by definition the enemy. A part of the *Dar al-Harb* , "the House of War," he is differentiated sharply from the *dhimmi* , the unbeliever who submits to Muslim rule. As for a Jewish state, one that rules over Muslims and "occupies" Muslim lands, it is nothing less than the very incarnation of unbelief, an intolerable source of contamination and a codified inversion of God's will.

When Haj Amin al Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, spoke together with Hitler, on Berlin radio, in 1942, he cried out: "Kill the Jews — kill them with

your hands, kill them with your teeth — this is well pleasing to Allah." Today, the Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) calls for the "realization of Allah's promise, no matter how long that should take. The Prophet, Allah bless him and grant him salvation, has said: 'The Day of Judgment will not come until Moslems fight the Jews, killing them.'" Israel is despised not because of land, but because it is a Jewish state. Unless this is understood, Israel will continue to hope too much, to waste critical time in vain endeavors, and to learn nothing from its humiliations. Samson can help Israel to understand.

The Dangers of Self-Delusion

Sixth, Israel can learn from Samson the dangers of self-delusion. Samson was blind before his eyes were put out by the Philistines. Enchanted by Delilah, he refused to see what was happening before his eyes. He believed only what he wanted to believe.

For Israel, such "blindness" is not confined to Judges. It was also evident on October 5, 1973, with the start of the Yom Kippur War. Until then, the country had been committed to an idea known generally as "the concept," the contrived idea that the Arabs were unwilling and incapable of renewing hostilities against the Jewish state. The overall assessment by Army Intelligence of enemy designs, lasting until October 5, 1973, was that war was "highly improbable" or "improbable." It was this fundamentally incorrect assumption that created a monumental intelligence blunder — the "oversight," in post-war Hebrew parlance. This is a blunder that could be repeated at far greater cost in the future, primarily because of the unforeseen consequences of the Peace Process.

The dangers of self-delusion revealed by Samson could also be understood at another, far more fundamental, level. The state system itself, within which Israel must always act, is now in a process of transformation. Should Israel delude itself about the nature of this transformation, it could pay dearly for its mistake.

Today, in the world generally and in the Middle East in particular, the state speaks, more and more, with religious authority. The state itself, as mentioned earlier, is becoming sacred. And with states as the abode of God on Earth, the profane is often not only permissible, it is doctrine.

Does Zionism Negate Messianic Redemption?

A final word here about the Jewish state, its uniqueness and its vital place in Jewish thought, especially in regard to traditional views on the coming of the Messiah. The question has arisen, of course, on whether or

not a Jewish state can be consistent with the expectations of messianic redemption. If redemption should depend upon "the experience of exile," or "homelessness," the State of Israel — a state that would block the coming of the Messiah — could be productive to Jews only where it would cease to exist.

Now that Israel is a fact, it is impossible to imagine a Jewish position that would willingly go so far to meet these particular messianic preconditions. Yet, a debate did rage on the underlying issues before 1948, when Martin Buber and Hermann Cohen argued fiercely on Zionism and messianism. Buber advanced the view of Exile as a tragic situation, while Cohen denied that Diaspora was Exile. In seeking an end to Diaspora, Cohen maintained, Zionists were negating the essential vision of messianism. Buber countered that Zionism actually furthers the realization of messianism:

Zionism opposes not the messianic idea, but rather the misrepresentation and distortion of this idea found in a considerable part of Liberal-Jewish, anti-Zionist literature. This misrepresentation and distortion glorifies, in the name of messianism, the dispersion, debasement and homelessness of the Jewish people, as something unconditionally valuable and fortunate, as something that must be preserved because it prepares humanity for the messianic age.

How different is Hermann Cohen's assessment, which proclaims: "The ghetto mentality is not the ghost, but the true spirit of Judaism and Jewish reality." Recalling Michah, "And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples, like dew from the Lord," (5:6, 7), Cohen expresses his "proud conviction" that Jews must "continue to live as divine dew in the midst of the peoples, and to remain fruitful among them and for them. All of the prophets place us in the midst of the peoples and their common perspective is the world mission of the remnant of Israel."

But the role of "divine dew" must certainly be reevaluated after the Holocaust. Could Hermann Cohen affirm today that Judaism, because of its messianic core, "is thoroughly a world religion?" Could he claim, fifty years after the great tragedy of diaspora Jewry, that this messianic core "cannot be impaired by historical reality, by misfortune, or even by the auspicious granting of equal rights?" Are "hope and trust" truly the correct path to Jewish survival? "Happy is he that waiteth (Dan. 12:12)," cautions Cohen, but how much longer shall be the wait? And who shall bear responsibility for harms suffered in the interim?

Israel's only real option for the future, as a Jewish state in the current system of states, is to endure.

Whatever the relative merits of the Zionism-messianism debate earlier on in history, Jewish redemption today positively requires survival of the Jewish state. So we may now return again to Samson, and to the lessons to be learned for such survival.

The Overriding Lesson of Samson

In John Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, the Chorus intones of Samson: "The glory late of Israel, now the grief." When this power of Israel had been overcome by the Philistines, when that great strength had been subjugated and humiliated, hopes for victory were supplanted by resignation and defeat. Although "divinely call'd" to "begin Israel's Deliverance," Samson's work was prevented by Delilah, by that "specious Monster." Yet of his calamity, "She was not the prime cause, but I my self."

I my self. In this acceptance of personal responsibility lies the overriding lesson of Samson for modern Israel. Taken alone, enemy deception, which can always be taken as given, will not overcome the Jewish state. This can happen only where Israel would yield to deception, surrendering its essential sources of strength and power on behalf of lies and illusions. Where it would strive to see clearly, Israel will not be blinded. Instead, aware that states, like individuals, are decidedly mortal and that unreason can govern even the "political" world, Jerusalem can draw wisdom from Israel's historical humiliations and from Samson's exploited vulnerabilities. If need be, Israel, following Samson, can even choose to "die with the Philistines," but it is with the preparations for such a dying (preparations, as we have seen, that could preclude this option) that Jerusalem should now be particularly concerned.

"Eyeless in Gaza," Samson labored at the mill, with slaves, lamenting that "...to me, strength is my bane, and proves the source of all my miseries." But here Samson was altogether mistaken. It is certainly not strength that brought about his unhappy fate, but rather his wilful abandonment of strength. Had he held on to his strength, and resisted the wiles and enchantments of enemy seductions, he would not have been reduced "To live a life half dead, a living death," until choosing to "die with the Philistines." He would have prevailed!

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