DOV S. ZAKHEIM

Of Battles and Military Strategies in Sefer Shoftim

THE BOOK OF JUDGES is the story of the trials and tribulations of the loose confederation of tribes that constituted the Israelites after Joshua's conquest. Sometimes some number of the twelve tribes would unite against a common external foe. Sometimes some tribes would remain neutral as their confederates fought a foreign enemy. Sometimes the tribes fought each other; they even descended into outright civil war, practically exterminating one of their number.

The wars described in Judges, indeed the wars that are discussed throughout *Tanakh*, rarely command the sustained interest of the reader and student. They often seem dry, and are difficult to conceptualize, much less visualize. Traditional commentators, who rarely had the desire, much less the opportunity, to immerse themselves in matters of military strategy and tactics, often sought homiletical lessons from these battles, at times straying very far from the plain meaning of the text.

Yet the military operations that Judges highlights have much to teach in military, as well as religious terms. They often demonstrate the degree to which our religious history is very much rooted in the real world, one in which warfare has, and likely always will, play a major role. As with so many other areas of human endeavor, Ben Bag Bag's dictum of *Hafah bah vehafah bah d'hulei bah*, which effectively means that it is important to revisit the Bible because each new interaction yields new insights, applies to the military sphere as well.

Judges provides some of the most graphic descriptions of strategy and tactics to come down to us from the early years of the Iron Age. We know that ancient peoples such as the Sumerians could mount large troop formations on the battlefield. We also know something about their weapons: bat-

RABBI DR. DOV ZAKHEIM served as Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) and Chief Financial Officer (2001-2004), and as Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Planning and Resources), at the Pentagon (1985 to 1987).

tle axes for unarmored infantry; spears for both unarmored and armored infantry; and mule driven wheeled vehicles for what might be termed cavalry. The Sumerians employed their unarmored troops as skirmishers, and their helmeted, armored spear carriers in close quarters. That, however, is the extent of our knowledge of their tactics; and about their strategy we know even less.[1]

It was the Egyptians and the Hittites that introduced both long range weapons and real mobility to the battlefield. They combined the long-distance firepower of the bow with the horse chariot, to enable them to defeat massed armies of foot infantry.[2] Both organized their military formations such that the chariots were in the vanguard, followed by foot infantry and then bowmen. The Egyptians employed two man chariots (for an archer and a driver), while the Hittites relied on heavier three-man vehicles. Both sides employed mercenaries as well as national forces.

Beginning in the 14th century BCE the two nations clashed repeatedly over territorial claims in what is now Syria and Lebanon. War finally broke out in the thirteenth century after the Egyptians assassinated a Hittite prince, and their most notable confrontation took place at Kadesh, in central Syria, on 10 May 1282 BCE, approximately the time of the Exodus (when Divine intervention disabled the Egyptian chariot force[3]). Kadesh is the first battle to be recorded in any detail, and underscores the importance—at least initially—of strategic surprise. The Hittites launched a surprise crossing of the Orontes river and initially ambushed and overran one of the four Egyptian divisions committed to the battle. They then overwhelmed a second Egyptian division with both a head-on attack and a chariot attack from the flank. The Egyptians were able to regroup, however, and in the absence of expected Hittite reinforcements, were able to smash the Hittite chariots. Both sides claimed victory. In fact, however, the Egyptians were forced to retreat, with the Hittites pursuing them until the vicinity of Damascus.[4]

Kadesh is not only the first detailed recording of an ancient battle, it is virtually the only one. Few other ancient battles of that epoch offer a sense of strategy, operations, or tactics. On the other hand, the Book of Judges not only describes military clashes, but also provides excellent insights into the nature of warfare that in some ways are as modern as our conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Moreover, just as the nature of the Israelites' wars varied widely from one era to the next, so too did the strategies and tactics employed by the Judges as they fought Israel's wars. Moreover, while the Book of Judges uni-

formly ascribes the success of its heroes to Divine intervention,[5] it does not always explicitly link that intervention to each of those strategies and tactics. These strategies and tactics included decapitation—the elimination of the enemy's leadership; unconventional warfare; the use of commando forces in what today might be termed "shock and awe" or effects-based operations; the use of decoys and maneuver to outflank the enemy; as well as more conventional pitched battles. The pages that follow will describe each of these in turn.

Background: The Jewish Polity After Joshua

The central fact of Israelite life for about two centuries after the death of Joshua was the absence of a strong central government. The twelve tribes were loosely organized into a tribal league, or confederation. Some of the tribes were more populous, militarily stronger, and better developed economically than their counterparts. Some were more exposed to enemy incursions from beyond the borders in which Joshua had settled them on the West Bank of the Jordan, and Moses on the East Bank. Some appear to have been more committed to the strictures of the Bible, while some were less so. In one respect almost all of them made the same strategic error: they did not drive out the Canaanite aborigines from the land. Chapter 1 of *Judges* indicates the degree to which so many tribes flouted the Biblical injunction to eliminate the native peoples.[6] The Josephite tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, and that of Zebulun permitted the Canaanites to remain in various towns in their territories, though they did tax them. Naphtali likewise taxed the Canaanites in its territory, but the latter evidently outnumbered the tribesmen, since *Shofetim* tells us that it was they who lived "among the Canaanites" and not vice versa. Similarly, Asher lived among its native peoples; the tribe was evidently too weak to impose any taxation on the Canaanites, since there is no mention of that in scripture, as is the case with Manasseh, Zebulun and Naphtali.[7]

Some tribes do appear to have attempted, or at least contemplated, driving out the natives, but were militarily unable to do so. The foot infantry of Judah could not budge the natives of the coastal plain, who boasted chariot-based armor. The Benjamites could not seize the mountain stronghold of Jebus (later Jerusalem).[8] The Dan tribesmen were not strong enough to prevent the Amorites from forcing them to retreat to mountain fastnesses.[9] The Amorites were unable to do the same to the more powerful tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

A major reason for the differing fortunes of the tribes as they confronted their neighbors was the absence of a strong central government, or indeed a government of any kind. Academic historians simply take this fact as a given. Yet there is much to the assertion in the Book of *Judges* that the troubles that were visited upon the Israelites were due to their indifference to the Torah. This view is graphically expressed near the very beginning of the Book, when a *Malakh*, or Heavenly messenger, rebukes the people for their constant backsliding after being rescued time and again by divinely appointed Judges.[10]

The Torah was the critical unifying element for the twelve tribes, the bond that held them together. Without a uniform and common religious commitment, all that kept them linked to one another was a common history and ethnic ties. Even the latter were not uniform: the descendants of the maidservants may well have been ethnically different. Moreover, as the Book of Judges attests, the Israelites sustained high rates of intermarriage that further weakened their religious commitment.[11] In any event, while some multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies such as the United States certainly have flourished, even recent history has demonstrated that ethnic commonality is no guarantee of unity in the absence of common religious practice; witness the decades-long conflicts in Ireland, the Balkans, and now Iraq as well.

The Israelites often paid a heavy price for their religious indifference and concomitant political disunity. There was no military organization to speak of: no standing army, no central store for weaponry or supplies, and naturally, no military training of any kind. In this regard they differed from the Assyrians, who as much as 150 years earlier already boasted a professional standing army, organized according to weapons type (chariots, infantry and engineers).[12] Israelite forces included no chariots—the armor of the day, nor weapons other than those that were hand-held. They were in effect, a group of distinct infantry militias, some better armed and more capable than others.

The better armed Tribes were able not only to impose taxes on their Gentile neighbors, but also to seize some of their cities. For example, Judah and Simeon joined forces to defeat a large army commanded by a particularly nasty king named Adoni Bezek, whose hallmark was to cut off the thumbs and big toes of his captured enemies (the same was later done to him).[13] Caleb, who had staunchly defended Moses against the allegations of the spies and had survived the wanderings of the desert, was able to lead a force that took Hebron. His half-brother Othniel ben Kenaz, conquered

Dvir to win the hand of Caleb's daughter Achsa.[14] Othniel later defeated a king named "Cushan the Doubly Evil" in what appears to have been a conventional battle about which nothing is reported.[15] The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh likewise seized Beit-El, thanks to the help of a fifth columnist who betrayed the city to them.[16]

Yet besieging cities, whose inhabitants no doubt were as terrified of the Israelites as were the people of Jericho when they heard of Joshua's invasion of the land, was quite a different matter from fighting pitched battles against armored forces. When the forces of Judah and Simeon swept down from the hills to the coastal plain, they were stopped by the Philistines, who had iron chariots.[17] Nevertheless, the stronger tribes at least were able to hold their own against their enemies.[18] On the other hand, the weaker ones were especially easy prey for predatory neighbors, both those living within the Israelites' putative boundaries and those outside them. This was particularly true if those neighbors mounted large armored formations.

As noted above, what saved the weaker tribes in particular, was Divine intervention, in the form of a temporary leader termed a "Judge." As the Book of Judges states: "And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and saved them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for it repented the LORD because of their groaning by reason of them that oppressed them and crushed them."[19] Nevertheless, the Book of Judges does not always discuss the role of the Almighty with respect to every individual who led the Israelites into battle.

It is not clear how far the authority of such judges extended. Given the nature of the tribal confederation, it tended to be limited to one particular vicinity. Moreover, the Judges did not rule consecutively. There were periods when "every man did as was proper in his own eyes." These times were essentially anarchic both in political and religious terms. It was then that the Tribes were most vulnerable not only to external attack but also to civil war.

Decapitation: The Case of Ehud Ben Gera

Decapitation is simply the elimination of a regime's leader or leadership. It tends to be rare, but is nevertheless the subject of many military writings, notably in the context of the theory of strategic nuclear warfare. It has been more common in both ancient and modern history that an army is defeated, the leader is then captured or otherwise eliminated, and the leader's regime then collapses. This was the case with respect to Napoleon, Hitler and Saddam Hussein. The case of Ehud ben Gera, on the other hand, involves decapitation in its purest form.

Eglon, the king of Moab, had joined forces with two more of Israel's traditional enemies, Amalek and Ammon, to mount an attack on the Israelite settlers. The combined force appears to have recovered the trans-Jordanian territories that had been settled by the tribe of Reuben but that had originally been Moabite land. Eglon's ancestor, Balak of Moab,[20] had lost this territory to Sichon the Amorite king, who in turn had lost it to the Israelites. Eglon and his coalition then crossed the Jordan, passing into territory belonging to the tribe of Benjamin and defeating its forces[21] in what appears to have been a pitched battle. Interestingly, but an indication of the fractionated nature of the Israelite polity, Benjamin's closest neighbors, the powerful tribes of Judah and Simeon, appear to have maintained their neutrality as Eglon and his allies crossed the West Bank of the Jordan.

Jericho[22] then fell to the invading forces. This was no doubt a serious humiliation for the Israelites, since it was the first city that had fallen to Joshua. As a result, Eglon was able to rule over the southern portion of Canaan for eighteen years.

Little is known about Ehud, the man who rose to defeat Eglon, other than that he stemmed from the tribe of Benjamin, whose territory Eglon had seized. Josephus speculates that he was "A youth . . . of gallant daring." Josephus adds that Ehud resided in Jericho,[23] which, if true, would have given Ehud a very personal reason to resent the Moabites.

Ehud does not appear to have descended from one of the tribe's leading families,[24] nor is he said to have had important connections of any kind. On the other hand, he must have had some special qualities, since he was chosen by the Benjamites to bring an offering to Eglon, their overlord.[25] Moreover, there is a tradition that he was a Torah student of Othniel ben Kenaz, which certainly would have prepared him for leading the people, as Othniel did for forty years after taking Dvir and defeating Cushan.[26]

Josephus states that Ehud actually had met Eglon in Jericho, "there he became familiar with him, courting and cajoling him with presents, whereby moreover, he endeared himself to those in waiting on the king."[27] Josephus is again speculating, but he writes of what clearly was a common occurrence in the royal courts of ancient despots, including that of Rome, with which he was most familiar.

Having once been defeated by Eglon, it appears that the Benjamites concluded they could not overthrow him by conventional means. Ehud was delegated to bring an offering to the king. He was able to obtain an audience with Eglon. Ehud had no problem with the retainers. Either because, as Josephus states, he was on friendly terms with them, or simply because they did not realize he was a left-handed swordsman, and thus wore his hilt

on his right side. As for the guards, Josephus claims that it was a hot summer's day and they were in a state of torpor. He also speculates, that they may have been "gone to lunch."(!)[28]

Whatever the reason, Ehud was able to see the king. When he told the king he had a message from God, Eglon dismissed his retinue and rose from his chair at the mention of the Divine (thus, according to Rabbinic tradition, ensuring that his daughter Ruth, would be the ancestor of King David[29]). Ehud, who had forged himself a dual edged sword, not a rarity in the ancient Middle East, but not common either, was then able to disembowel him.

The death of Eglon meant the end of Moabite rule over Benjamin. Evidently, the late king was a uniquely powerful individual whose capabilities were not matched by his successors. The Moabites were thrown into disarray, and the Benjamites were able to defeat a force of 10,000 Moabites and expel them from their land. Decapitation had worked.

Unconventional Warfare: Shamgar and Samson

Unconventional warfare (UW) is defined as "a wide variety of types of conflict not bound by the classical guidelines that normally shape the nature and use of military power."[30] Such warfare, so unlike confrontations on the battlefield by massed armies, antedates David's famous slingshot and is as modern as the war in Iraq. Guerilla tactics, subversion, kidnapping, and sabotage employing improvised explosive devices are also a form of unconventional warfare. So too are many activities of America's Special Operating Forces, including psychological warfare and providing operational and material support for "friendly" insurgents and resistance groups.[31] A major characteristic of these operations is that they take place inside enemy-held, enemy-controlled or politically sensitive territory.[32]

The Book of Judges relates at least two cases of what might be termed UW. The first is that of a relatively little known Judge, Shamgar ben Anat. The second is the more famous Samson.

Virtually nothing is known about Shamgar. Indeed, because his first name is unique to the Scriptures and is of Hittite origin, while his father's name was common as both a male and female name among the Canaanites and residents of Syria,[33] some academic Biblical scholars have speculated that he was not even a Hebrew.[34] It may simply have been the case that, like many other Jews, his family had adopted native names.[35] Why he should have helped the Israelites had he not been an Israelite himself is cer-

tainly a mystery. In any event, the Bible offers nothing about him, not even his tribe. Some traditions have him descending from the tribe of Simeon;[36] even though there is a conflicting tradition that no Judge descended from Simeon because of the sin of Zimri ben Salu.[37] That tradition does not give any origins for Shamgar, perhaps fueling additional uncertainty about his Israelite origins. For whatever reason, Don Isaac Abravanel asserts that Shamgar actually was a Kohen.[38]

As if there were not enough confusion about Shamgar,, there has also been some speculation that he was a city king of Ben-anath in Galilee, maybe even the head of a small tribal confederation. There is nothing in the text to support this assertion either. In truth, no one really knows.

It is not even clear whether he was actually a judge. The Bible does not specifically say so. As in other matters relating to this shadowy figure, tradition is divided on this issue. Some commentators speculate that he was actually a contemporary of Ehud, and served on his own as a judge for but a year after Ehud's death, at which point he too passed away.[39] On the other hand, *Midrash Tehillim* explicitly states that he was not a judge.[40]

Whatever the case, the Biblical text credits Shamgar with an amazing feat of unconventional warfare. Operating apparently on his own, he was able to slaughter six hundred Philistines with an ox-goad.[41] Evidently, his act of prowess was enough to cow the Philistines, so that the Israelites had some relief from enemy pressures along the southeastern coastal plain. He did not provide relief for the nation as a whole, however, for at the very same time, Jabin, the king of Hazor, had subjugated the Israelites in the north-central plain.[42]

In contrast, Samson, of the tribe of Dan, is one of the most famous of all Biblical figures. Like Shamgar, he too operated on his own against the Philistines.[43] Like Ehud, he was of humble origins. Moving southward from his native Dan, he was able to contain this hostile nation through some extraordinary feats of bravery in a most unconventional fashion.

He somehow captured three hundred foxes, and by attaching 150 live pairs to burning torches, he was able to wipe out much of the Philistines' harvest. He then went on single-handedly to slaughter a large number of Philistine infantry and cavalry. When the tribe of Judah once again declared its neutrality, as it appears to have done in Ehud's time, Samson allowed himself to be delivered to the invading Philistine army, only to use the jawbone of an ass to kill a thousand enemy troops. Finally, he used his amazing strength, which he recovered as his hair grew after its having been cut, to kill three thousand more in Gaza, by wrapping his arms around the pillars of a palace packed with the Philistine elite.

Samson's unconventional efforts resembled Shamgar's in another respect; he was only able to provide temporary relief to the Israelites who suffered from Philistine harassment. The residents of the coastal plain continued to be a problem for the Israelites through the reign of Saul. It is the case to this day that unconventional operations are not a complete battlefield solution. They must be complemented by, and followed up with, decisive conventional operations. Otherwise, an enemy will not be completely defeated, and can always re-group at a minimum to harass and disrupt a society's peaceful activities. Current operations by the Taliban in Afghanistan are a modern case in point. As for the Philistines, they were only brought to heel when David became king of a united Israelite nation.

Deborah and Barak: A Brilliant Operation, Brilliantly Executed

King Jabin of Hazor was one of the most resilient enemies the Israelites faced as they settled in the Canaanite lands. He had stood at the head of a major alliance of northern Galilean chieftains, including the kings of Mador, Shimron and Achshaf that confronted Joshua and the invading Israelites. Joshua defeated the massive Canaanite combined force, however, at the Waters of Merom (more recently called the Huleh swamp until it was drained in the last century) located in north of the Sea of Galilee.[44] Indeed, the Book of *Joshua* states that the Israelite forces destroyed Hazor's armored force, burnt the city, and killed the inhabitants.[45]

Still, Jabin may have survived. In any event, either he or his successor seems to have both rebuilt the fortified city and retained his position as leader of the Galilean cities that remained under Canaanite control.[46] He also seems to have reconstituted his military. Indeed, upon Joshua's passing, followed by that of Ehud, Jabin was able to re-impose Canaanite authority over the lands settled by the Israelites. To do so, Jabin relied heavily on his large, and presumably upgraded, armored force of 900 chariots, led by his senior general Sisera.[47] The mobile chariot patrols could emerge from walled Canaanite cities to control the plains, terrorize Israelite farmers, and intercept Israelite raiders that attempted to harass Canaanite caravans.

This situation persisted for two decades before the Israelites revolted. The revolt appears to have been prompted by Jabin's occupation of *Haroshet Hagoyim*, a strategically critical crossroads that commanded a narrow pass from the Jezreel Valley to the coastal plain north of Haifa, as well as roads to the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan Valley. By controlling *Haroshet Hagoyim*, Sisera's armored forces had easy access to almost all of northern Canaan and a key route to its south.[48]

It was Deborah who organized the Israelite military response. Deborah is most certainly the Bible's best-known female leader. Like so many of the other judges, her origins are unclear, and were likely humble. But she certainly was a woman of tremendous talent. She was both prophetess and judge. While other women had been endowed with prophecy, it was a rarity for a married woman to function as her people's ruler and military planner. She has been compared to Joan of Arc; no doubt the later looked to Deborah for inspiration.[49]

Deborah conceived the battle plan to defeat Sisera's powerful armored force.[50] She recognized that the lightly armed Israelite militia was no match for Sisera's chariots. Accordingly, she told her companion, Barak ben Avinoam of the tribe of Naphtali, to muster 10,000 troops from his tribe and that of Zebulun.

Given Sisera's domination of the land, it is likely that Barak encountered difficulties recruiting his force.[51] They may have been reassured by the fact that they would deploy on Mount Tabor, which Sisera's armor could not assault.[52] The mountain also afforded the Israelite forces excellent situational awareness with an unobstructed view of the surrounding countryside, as well as the possibility of launching a surprise attack if Sisera's camp was bivouacked at its base.[53]

Deborah assured Barak that Sisera would deploy his forces from his base at *Haroshet Hagoyim* to the swampy area around the Kishon Brook, not far from Taanach. Deborah indicated in her Victory Song that a Canaanite force confronted the Israelites at Taanach, which is not close to Mount Tabor, but rather is near the waters of Megiddo. It is possible therefore, that there was a second force, perhaps from Ephraim, that drew Sisera away from the mountain by passing through Taanach and deploying near the Kishon Brook.

Sisera not only focused on this second force, but also encountered the scourge of all military planners, unforeseen natural conditions.[54] The cavalry suffered in unusually scorching heat which rendered all iron, and therefore the chariots unfit to ride. Sisera's troops sought to escape the heat by jumping into the Kishon brook.[55] But an unseasonal storm broke, flooding the brook and causing havoc among Sisera's forces.[56] The storm also obscured the vision of the Canaanites who were shooting up the mountain, but did not interfere with Barak's men, since the storm was at their back. Finally, the storm broke the heat, but caused a precipitous drop in temperature,[57] which also hampered whatever infantry Sisera had at his disposal. It also rendered mobility useless in the marshes around the brook.

In the meantime, Barak and his men were able to swoop down from the mountain to destroy Sisera's force. It was a brilliant victory, planned by

Deborah, and executed by Barak. As Deborah predicted, however, it was she who ultimately got most of the credit, both in Jewish and secular history.[58]

Shock and Awe, Effects-Based Operations, and Gideon's Commando Forces

Midian was another of Israel's ancient enemies. Balaam was a Midianite, and the Israelites had killed him and five Midianite kings in a battle led by Moses.[59] The Midianites appear to have become ascendant again after the fall of Jabin the king of Hazor, forming an alliance with the Amalekites, another ancient foe, and others of "the East." These tribes terrorized the Israelites for seven years, forcing them to hide in caves as they employed a scorched earth policy of destroying everything the Israelites produced, whether grain or livestock.[60]

The Israelites' new liberator was also a man of humble origins. Gideon was a farmer, the son of a farmer, and a man with no pretensions. As he described himself, his clan was the poorest of his tribe, Manasseh, and he was the most junior of his household.[61] Yet he proved himself a brilliant strategist, organizing a force of shock troops composed of three hundred men of demonstrated military prowess and religious commitment. The manner in which he chose those troops is noteworthy. By testing them to see if they would drink water while lying flat, rather than kneeling, he could determine whether they were habituated to kneeling, a sign both of lukewarm commitment to the religion of Israel and of a weak sense of situational awareness in a dangerous war zone. On the other hand, in order both to demonstrate their aversion to copying the religious mores of the surrounding nationalities and to retain their weapons in the presence of the nearby enemy, some of the men drank while flat on their stomachs, which was the Divine test for membership in the commando force.[62]

From an initial volunteer force of thirty-two thousand, which he had reduced to ten thousand, Gideon identified three hundred men who passed his test. These were constituted into a commando force, that he led in a daring night operation against a large force of massed Midianites, Amalekites and their eastern allies, who bivouacked in the Jezreel Valley. By operating at night, Gideon realized two distinct objectives. First, he was able to obviate the utility of the enemies' mounted forces, whether on horseback or in armored chariots. Second, he was able to deliver a crushing psychological blow to the enemy, the ancient equivalent of "shock and awe," or effects-based operations, which are designed to convey such an impression of overpowering force, that the enemy becomes dispirited politically as well as militarily.

"Shock and awe" was a term coined by the defense analyst Harlan Ullman. As he defined the term in his later writings, its "original intent . . . was to 'affect, influence and control the will and perception of the adversary.'" The term was used to describe the bombing attacks on Iraq, though Ullman asserted that was never the intent of "shock and awe."[63]

"Shock and awe" is actually a subset of a more systematic approach to warfare termed "effects-based operations" or EBO. Effects based-operations (EBO) is a complex theory that has been under development by the United States Joint Forces Command for over five years. It involves creation of "a sense of being pursued" that is meant to bring about a behavioral change, ideally the political as well military collapse, on the part of enemy. While these operations have the same intent as "shock and awe," they are, as one critic has put it, "heavily dependent on mathematical methods for predicting and measuring effects."[64]

They are also subject to misinterpretation. It appears that the Israeli Defense Forces misunderstood the nature of EBO by applying stand-off weaponry to change the behavior of Hezbollah. They waited too long to attack on the ground and failed to have the impact on Hezbollah that they had sought.[65]

On the other hand, Gideon's employment of his commandos was very much in line with both the "shock and awe" and EBO approaches that would be articulated three millennia later. It also reflected his keen grasp of the nature of command, for every commander knows that the ability to communicate, control and coordinate is the key to success in battle.

Gideon divided his three hundred hand-picked commandos into companies of one hundred men each. Each man not only carried a sword but also a shofar and an empty pitcher with a torch inside. Gideon then placed himself at the head of one company and instructed the two others to attack upon the sound of the shofar that would emanate from the one he was leading.

Gideon launched his assault in the middle of the night, just as the Midianite watch had changed. The three units attacked the Midianite camp from three directions, blew their shofars, broke their pitchers, and carried the torches in their left hands with their swords drawn.[66] The resulting light and sound show terrified the Midianites, who were certain they were being attacked by a much larger force. They were unable to mount their chariots at night and even panicked to the point that they attacked one another. Gideon's men then charged into the camp with a blood curdling battle cry and drove the Midianite coalition southward into the hands of the waiting forces of Naftali, Asher and Manasseh, resulting in a complete rout of the invaders. One hundred twenty thousand of the Canaanite infantry fell in the

battle.[67] At the same time, Gideon alerted the tribe of Ephraim to intercept the Midianites before they could cross the Jordan. The Ephraimites did so, killing and beheading two Midianites kings, Oreb and Zeeb.[68]

Gideon's three commando companies continued in hot pursuit, surprised the remaining fifteen thousand infantry while they decompressed from the battle, and defeated them as well. They then captured Zevah and Zalmunna, the Midianite kings, thus bringing the operation to a spectacularly successful conclusion.[69] It was a textbook case of how an effects-based operation should be conducted.

Civil War: The Near Extermination of Benjamin

None of the aforementioned cases of warfare ever drew in all of the tribes. In some instances, they remained aloof while their brothers went to battle, as did Judah in the time of Ehud or Reuben's studied neutrality, awaiting the outcome of the battle between Barak and Jabin.[70] In some cases they cooperated, but only in a most negative sense, as when the Judahite tribesmen turned Samson over to the Philistines. In some cases, tribes were johnny-come-latelys, as when Ephraim complained to Gideon for not including them in the operation against Jabin.[71] Finally, in some cases they were actually hostile, as when the people of Succoth and Penuel refused provisions to Gideon's tired band of three hundred men who were pursuing the defeated Midianite kings Zebah and Zalmunna after the battle of the Jezreel Valley.[72]

The lack of unity, both communal and religious, and the sense that every man did "what was right in his eyes,"[73] was never more apparent than when the tribes were plunged into civil war. The proximate cause of the war was an atrocity perpetrated by the Benjamites of the Gibeah district against a visiting stranger's concubine. This act was a clear violation of the Torah's prohibition against sexual assaults. Indeed, in describing the events preceding the rape, Judges recounts the Benjamites' desire to sodomize the man himself in terms almost identical to those describing the behavior of the people of Sodom toward Lot's visitors.[74]

In the aftermath of the rape, the man, a Levite, proceeded to dismember the woman, send her bodily parts throughout the land, and demand satisfaction from the Benjamites. The other tribes, outraged by the behavior of the Benjamites, mobilized a force of 400,000 foot infantry, of which 40,000 were in combat service support providing rations. They gave the Benjamites an ultimatum that they must deliver over the guilty parties of Gibeah to resolve the blood feud. The Benjamites refused to do this, and the two sides went to war.[75]

The Benjamites, with a force of only 26,700, were outnumbered by a factor of more than 15:1. But the Benjamites had two distinct advantages. Seven hundred of them, were, like their tribesman Ehud, left-handed swordsmen, which caught right-handed infantry by surprise. In addition, they appear to have been better trained than their counterpart militias. In particular, 700 were expert marksmen with the slingshot, meaning that they could hide behind cover, emerge, fire accurately, and quickly take cover again.

The remaining tribes did not initially fight as one large unit. They asked and received Divine guidance to deploy Judah first, Judah being both the most regal of the tribes,[76] and the tribe most proximate to the Benjamites. But they did not ask a second crucial question: could Judah's forces alone defeat Benjamin's infantry.[77] In the event, Judah's little used militia launched a poorly planned attack on the outskirts of Gibeah. Reckoning that it would only face the forces from the town itself,[78] it proved no match for the well-trained and organized forces drawn from the entire tribe of Benjamin, who slaughtered 22,000 of the attacking forces.

The Judahite forces then repeated their mistakes. Again, they sought Divine guidance as to whether to attack, but failed to ask if the attack would be successful. They then pressed ahead with the identical poorly developed strategy, with results that likewise were the same as before. This time the Benjamites slew 18,000 infantry. For their part, the Benjamites appear to have lost no personnel in either battle. The other tribes then repaired to Beit-El and sought divine guidance through Pinchas the high priest. At last they were told not only to fight, but that they would succeed.

This time the tribal coalition approached Gibeah with a deliberate plan. An armed force would deploy before Gibeah as in the past, challenging the Benjamites to a meeting engagement. The Benjamites would be lulled into thinking that the tribes would once again mount a frontal attack. In addition, however, the Israelite coalition placed men in ambush all around Gibeah to disrupt the Benjamite battle plan. The main force, however, was positioned at Baal Tamar. Their mission was to wipe out the other Benjamite cities before they could mobilize in support of the forces at Gibeah.[79]

The Benjamites fell for the ruse. They emerged from the town, attacking the force arrayed against them and killing thirty men on the roads to the town and to Beit El. Mistakenly thinking that victory was theirs, the Benjamites pressed on, only to find that their town was burning. The billowing smoke was a signal to the Israelites who had been retreating southward. They turned on their pursuers, and were joined by the men lying in ambush. The Benjamites found that they were forced to march east into the

desert. Even as they were doing so, the main force of 10,000 hardened troops had emerged from Baal Tamar and was destroying their towns and choking off reinforcements. In the end, the Benjamites lost over 90% of their forces, 25,100 in all. Their towns had been burned and only a remnant, 600 men in all, survived to escape to the desert.[80]

Ultimately, the remaining tribes regretted the impact of the civil war and a reconciliation did take place. By then, however, virtually an entire tribe of Israel had been wiped out. For this war, like all civil wars, was more brutal than any conflict with an external enemy.

Some Concluding Thoughts

The tools of war have changed over the centuries; but the basic elements of strategy have not. Sun Tsu, the great Chinese military strategist, thrived around the time that the first Temple was destroyed, some 2600 years ago. Yet he continues to be studied in major war colleges around the world. Our Rabbis have taught that *maaseh avot siman lebanim*, the deeds of the fathers are a sign for the sons. That dictum applies to military history as to all other aspects of our Biblical history. There are, and will always be, lessons to be learned for the world, in general, and for the Jewish people and their fighting forces, in particular.

NOTES

1. Mark Herman, *The Times History of Warfare* (London: 1980), p. 3.
2. *Ibid.*, John Bright, *A History of Israel* 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), p. 108
3. The Torah also records the power of the Egyptian armored force, as well as of its horse cavalry. Indeed, one of the most significant military miracles that took place when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea was the Divine intervention that led to the disabling of Pharaoh's armored force, which forced his troops to dismount in order to free the chariots from the sea's muddy bottom (*veyenahageyhu bichveidut—Exodus* 14:25.)
4. See Herman, *Times History of Warfare*, pp. 3-4; Bright, *A History of Israel*, p. 113.
5. See, for example, *Judges* 2:17, "And the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those that spoiled them."
6. See, for example, *Numbers* 33:51-56
7. *Judges* 1: 27-33.

8. *Ad loc.* 21.
9. *Ad loc.* 34.
10. *Ibid.* 2.
11. *Ibid.* 3:6-7.
12. Col. Trevor N. Dupuy, editor-in-chief, et. al. *International Military and Defense Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1 (Washington: Brassey's 1993), p. 299.
13. *Judges,* 1:3-7.
14. *Ad loc.* 12-13.
15. *Ibid.*, 3:10. All that can be said of the battle with Cushan was that, like that of Blenheim in Robert Southey's famous poem, "'twas a famous victory."
16. *Ibid.* 1:22-26.
17. *Ad Loc.* 1:19. Josephus surmises that the enemy in question was the Philistines; since the preceding verse speaks of Philistine cities, the text would appear to bear him out. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* trans. H. St. J. Thackeray and Ralph Marcus (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), V: 4.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Judges* 2: 18.
20. Yitzchok Levi, *Parshiot Besifrei Hanevi'im: Shoftim* (Jerusalem: Feldheim: 1991), p. 59.
21. Thus Bright, but his case is both plausible and not inconsistent with the Biblical text. John Bright, *A History of Israel,* 3rd. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), p. 179.
22. Thus *Rashi*; it is called "the City of Palms" in the text.
23. Josephus, *Antiquities*, V: 188-190.
24. Adin Steinzaltz, *Biblical Images: Men and Women of the Book* trans. Yehuda Hanegbi and Yehudit Keshet (New York: Basic Books, 1984), p. 108.
25. Itchak Levi does consider him to have been the "parnas" or leading financier of the community, hence his being chosen to present the gift to Eglon., Levi, *Parshiot*, p. 53.
26. *Judges* 3:10-11.
27. *Antiquities* V:189.
28. *Ibid.* V:190.
29. Thus Rav Bibi in the name of Rav Reuven, *Ruth Rabbah* 2.
30. Dupuy, et. al. *International Military and Defense Encyclopedia*, Vol. 6, p. 2809.
31. See John M. Collins, *Special Operations Forces: An Assessment* (Washington, DC : National Defense University Press, 1994), p. 4.
32. *Ibid.,* p. 175.
33. Yehuda Elitzur, *Da'at Mikra: Shoftim* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1993), p. 46.
34. Bright, *History*, p. 179. Bright cites various scholars who call it a Hurrian name.
35. Elitzur, *Shoftim, ad loc.*
36. See *Midrash Tehillim*, on Psalm 90 in *Midrash Shochar Tov Al Tehillim* (Jerusalem: Amudim, 1992), p. 174. *Daas Sofrim, ad loc.*, cited in Rabbi Avrohom Fishelis and Rabbi Shmuel Fishelis, *Judges: A New English Translation* (New York: Judaica Press, 1995). P. 26.
37. *Midrash Tadsheh*, cited in *Yalkut Shomoni*, Vol. II, 42,.
38. Introduction to his commentary to *Judges.*
39. *Metzudas David* on *Judges* 3:31.
40. Statement of Rabbi Yudan, *Midrash Shohar Tov*, Psalm 90, *loc. cit.*
41. *Judges, ad loc.*

42. *Ralbag* (Gersonides), *ad loc.*
43. Steinzaltz erroneously asserts that Samson was unique, in that "almost everything he did was as a private individual . . . Samson function[ed] as a leader without any followers." (*Biblical Images*, pp. 108-109). Yet Samson was not unique. Shamgar likewise appears to have acted alone, and there is not even any mention of his serving as a Judge. On the other hand, the Bible explicitly states that Samson "judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years" (*Judges* 15:20), which indicates that while he operated in an unconventional fashion militarily, he did lead the people in matters of law and justice. Nor is there any evidence that when acting as a judge, he behaved, in Steinzaltz' words, as an "adolescent ruffian" (p. 110).
44. *Joshua*, 11:1-9.
45. *Ibid.* 11:9-11
46. The Book of *Joshua* states that the king of Hazor was put to the sword (11:10) It is therefore possible that Jabin was simply a dynastic name, similar to Pharoah. See Chaim Herzog and Mordechai Gichon, *Battles of the Bible,* (London: Greenhill, 2002), p. 61 and p. 300 f.n. 15.
47. *Judges* 4:2-3. Herzog and Gichon speculate that Sisera may also have been a chieftain in his own right, *Battles*, p. 65.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*; Steinzaltz, *Biblical Images*, p. 101.
50. Rabbi Simon is cited in *Yalkut Shimoni* as asserting that Sisera was excessively confident in his armored force. *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. 1, 230.
51. See *Radak* (Rabbi David Kimchi) on *Judges* 4:6; Josephus, *Antiquities* V:204; Levy, *Parshiot*, p. 70.
52. See *Radak*
53. *Judges* 4:6; Herzog and Gichon, *Battles*, p. 67.
54. It is worth recalling that the disastrous 1980 Desert One mission that was meant to rescue the U.S. hostages held by Iran was aborted in no small part because an unforeseen dust storm grounded a key helicopter and delayed the arrival of the others at the appointed rendezvous site. See Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah: The First Battle in America's War with Islam* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006), p. 450ff. and Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House, 1985), pp. 296-97.
55. See *Pesahim* 118b, which relates that Sisera's men used iron staves which then became too hot to handle. Clearly, the chariots would have been too hot to ride in.
56. The Talmud's statement (*ibid.)* that the Kishon swept the men to the sea indicates that the wadi flooded. Josephus writes of the storm, presumably basing himself on the statement in Deborah's song (*Judges* 4:20) that "they fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera." Bright accepts Josephus' report of a "torrential rainstorm [that] bogged the Canaanite chariots down", Bright, *History*, p. 180.
57. Josephus' assertion about the cold restricting the infantry is certainly plausible given the Divinely-inspired perturbations of the temperature and topography. See Josephus, *Antiquities*, V: 205.
58. *Judges* 4:9.
59. *Numbers* 31:8
60. *Judges* 6:1-6.
61. *Ibid., 6:14.

62. *Ibid.* 7:3-8. See also Herzog and Gichon, *Battles*, pp. 73-75.
63. Harlan K. Ullman, *Finishing Business: 10 Steps to Defeat Global Terror* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004, p. 55.
64. Milan N. Vego, "Effects-Based Operations: A Critique," *Joint Force Quarterly* 41 (2nd Qauarter 2006), pp. 51-57. The quote appears on p. 51.
65. For a complete discussion of the failure of Israel's military strategy in Lebanon, see Ron Tira, *The Limitations of Standoff Firepower-Based Operations: On Standoff Warfare, Maneuver and Decision* (TelAviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2007).
66. *Judges* 6:18-23.
67. *Ibid.,* 8:10.
68. *Ibid.,* 7:24-25.
69. *Ibid.,* 8:4, 10-12.
70. *Rashi* on *Judges* 5:15; *Targum* on *ibid.* 5:16.
71. *Ibid.* 8:1.
72. *Ibid.,* 8:4-9.
73. *Judges* 17:6 and again 21:25.The latter is the final verse of the book, and in many ways sums it up.
74. "Bring them out unto us that we may know them," *Genesis* 19:5; "bring forth the man that came into thy house that we may know him," *Judges* 19:22.
75. The details of this tragic sequence of events are spelled out in *ibid.* 19:15-20:13.
76. See Elitzur, *Daat Mikra: Shoftim*, p. 174.
77. Ralbag on *Judges* 20:18.
78. Abravanel on *Judges* 20:19-21.
79. Elitzur, *Da'at Mikra: Shoftim*, p. 177.
80. *Judges* 20:30-48; *Elitzur, Da'at Mikra: Shoftim*, pp.173-178.