

Israel News Flash from David Dolan

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Below are two items that I think most of you will find interesting and hopefully informative as well. The first is a letter that was published last Friday in the weekly *Jerusalem Post Magazine*. It concerns the role of "democracy" in the turbulent Middle East. The columnist mentioned is also the magazine's editor. Below the letter is a longer article about the possible prophetic implications of the escalating violence in Syria and increasing prospects of a larger war in the region. I realize that some of my subscribers are not religiously inclined, so you may want to skip that if so. As with all of my writings, feel free to copy, post or pass it along as you wish, however please with attribution. The possibility of a regional war seems to grow every day, as even the UN chief noted last week, so we do certainly appreciate your prayers at this time. My monthly Israel news update will be sent out in two weeks time.

Sir--Israel Kasnett's column on the war in Afghanistan was a good summary of the many serious challenges facing the United States and Israel in the ongoing "war on terror." However I question his contention that Israel "would clearly benefit from the presence of democratic countries on all its borders."

Israel already has one neighbor that holds regular democratic elections, Lebanon. Despite this, the country has been racked by constant sectarian strife and occasional civil war. Since 1982, Lebanon has hosted Hezbollah, one of the most dangerous terrorist organizations in the world.

I received mostly negative feedback when I wrote a commentary for *World Net Daily* on the eve of the 2003 war in Iraq, warning that President Bush's declared goal of promoting Western-style democracy there was not necessarily a good thing. I pointed out that Algeria had tried to go the democratic route in the early 1990s. When the militant Islamic Salvation Front won the first election round, the army stepped in, sparking off a decade of bloodshed that took 160,000 lives. Last year, Islamists won the first democratic elections in Tunisia and they are now taking over Egypt--both as a result of the "democratic process." Will the Muslim Brotherhood be better for Israel? If unfettered elections were held in neighboring Jordan, Muslim militants would probably prevail. When the Palestinians held parliamentary elections in early 2006, it was the radical Hamas movement that triumphed.

The sad fact is that all of Israel's neighbors are Islamic dominated states comprised of "voters" who would most likely follow the same path that Egypt is currently embarked upon, to Israel's clear peril.

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WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST

BY DAVID DOLAN

With the Middle East spinning around at present faster than a Hanukkah dreidel, some have been writing to seek my opinion on the possible prophetic implications of the escalating warfare in Syria and the dramatic Muslim Brotherhood advance in Egypt. Although I am a journalist by profession, having reported the news from Israel and the region since the early 1980s, I also have a longtime personal interest in eschatological biblical prophecy. This is evidenced by my authorship of two prophetic novels, *THE END OF DAYS* and *MILLENNIUM: THE LORD REIGNS*. I also touched upon some prophetic themes in my 2001 book, *ISRAEL IN CRISIS: WHAT LIES AHEAD?* Plus there is the fact that the essence of all biblical prophecy is nothing less than news that has not yet transpired. It is history (His story) revealed before it has actually unraveled on the world stage. In other words, it is hardly divorced from the news.

In particular, I have been getting inquiries concerning the possible connection of the growing Syrian conflict with prophecies found in Isaiah 17, Psalm 83 and Ezekiel 38-39. As some of you will know from reading the aforementioned books, or other articles or public talks I've given over the years, I have long felt that Isaiah 17 is most likely the next major end-time biblical prophecy that will unfold in the turbulent Middle East. This prophecy seems to be echoed by a similar one found in Jeremiah 49, verses 23-27, which tells of a future time when "panic" would grip the Syrian capital city, Damascus, as its "young men fall dead in her streets" and the city's walls are "set on fire."

As most of you will already know, Isaiah's prophecy begins with the total destruction of Damascus, which the seer foretells will become completely uninhabited with only "flocks" of animal wandering around in its ruins (17:1-2). Located fifty miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea east of Lebanon, the historic city is home today to nearly two million people, with another half million living in its suburbs.

Isaiah's stark prophecy goes on to speak of Israel suffering greatly during the same time frame, implying that an intense war between the two longtime enemy countries stands at the heart of the jarring oracle. It mentions that while Damascus will be "removed from being a city" and "sovereignty" will disappear from it as well (17:1,3), the "glory of Jacob will fade, and the fatness of his flesh will become lean" (17:5). As bad as that sounds, the Hebrew prophet is foretelling that Israel will NOT be destroyed as Damascus will be, but instead "gleanings will be left in it like the shaking of an olive tree" (6). So many "olives" will be shaken off the Tree of Israel, but by no means all of them. Isaiah uses the olive tree analogy later on in Chapter 24, which speaks of the final judgment of the world, giving further evidence that Isaiah 17 is also an "end time" prophecy.

Note that in the very first verse, the great Hebrew prophet wrote that, "Damascus is *about* to be removed from being a city." So was this prophecy fulfilled in or near his time on earth, meaning around the 8th century before the birth of Christ? There is no evidence at all to suggest this was the case. In fact, Israel's sufferings during that era were largely due to internal wars and invasions from the Persian and Babylonian empires, not conflicts with Damascus per se. Although historians say the renowned Syrian capital city has been conquered at least 17 times during recorded history, it has *never* been destroyed and abandoned as Isaiah foretold would one day take place. So why did the prophet write that the city's demise was "about to" take place? Many scholars believe, as I do, that this is what is widely known as the "prophetic tense." This occurs elsewhere in prophetic biblical literature when something extremely important and life changing is described as either being imminent when it is not actually looming in an historic timeline, or as if it had already occurred, which is an even more dramatic prophetic voice to employ.

The potential for a massive armed conflict between Israel and Syria at this time is quite obvious. I was struck by the comments from a senior Israeli army commander recorded in last Friday's *Jerusalem Post* newspaper and other Israeli media outlets. Addressing his troops at the end of major military exercise held in the Jordan Valley to prepare for possible war with Syria and Lebanon, Nahal Brigades commander Colonel Yehuda Fuchs said "We are prepared for war, which draws closer with every day that passes." This came two days after air raid sirens were sounded all over Jerusalem last week as part of a three day drill to test the capital city's readiness for a major missile attack. While I knew from the news that such action would take place, many others missed that information, causing some momentary panic as the loud rising and falling wailing went on for around two minutes just before 5:30 in the afternoon.

An earlier commentary by one of Israel's most respected columnists, Chemi Shalev, focused on the depth of conflict that is at the center of the current fighting inside Syria. Writing for the *Ha'Aretz* (The Land) newspaper on June 1, he pointed out that the escalating conflict is mainly about the survival of the minority Alawite Assad regime in the face of majority Sunni Muslim attempts to topple it. He noted that the two rival Islamic groups have been viciously battling each other for many centuries. With each contemporary Alawite atrocity (the sect is an offshoot of the Shiite wing of Islam), the chances that Assad will obey Hillary Clinton's repeated demands, echoed by many other Western officials, to immediately give up power fade ever further into the waning sunset, he wrote. The Syrian dictator and his cronies are not about to forget what happened last year to Hosni Mubarak or to the late Muammar Kadaffi. Shalev opined instead that the international demands are mainly forcing Assad and his cronies into a corner (which I agree is the case), and the only way out might be an attack upon Israel. He warned that the vicious Syrian regime has a huge army at its disposal--at least 300,000 men, about twice the size of Israel's fulltime forces--and one of the world's largest chemical weapons arsenals, plus a massive stockpile of long, medium and short range missiles, mostly supplied by Russia.

This leads Shalev to conclude that Syrian strongman Bashar Assad may choose what he calls the "doomsday option." He wrote that "Faced with his own political demise and convinced that his people may face murderous retribution, it is not too outlandish to imagine a scenario in which Assad comes to believe that a conflict with Israel or an all-out regional war is his best remaining option. He is, one should never forget, capable of wreaking havoc and destruction not only on most Israeli cities but also on Turkey, Cyprus, Jordan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia--and this

before one factors in Hezbollah, with its 50,000-plus stockpile of rockets and short range missiles, and Iran, which views the Assad regime as an irreplaceable strategic asset and which may also come around to viewing a regional conflagration as a way of overcoming crippling sanctions and growing isolation."

As I often point out when speaking to audiences around the world, Israeli leaders have long made clear that they will not be the *first* to introduce weapons of mass destruction onto the regional stage. However they then make equally clear that *they will be the second to do so* if such weapons are used in any significant way against the tiny state of Israel, just 280 miles from north to south and less than 30 miles across in most places. Of course, this is meant to be a *deterrence* to such a heinous non-conventional attack, not a threat to launch one out of the blue. Still, Israeli leaders mean it when they say they will not sit idly by while their determined enemies attempt to "complete what Hitler began," as the late Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini often put it. The implication from Isaiah's prophecy, buttressed by Jeremiah, is that Damascus will be destroyed by something akin to powerful nuclear warheads, which would leave deadly radiation in their wake. This would preclude human occupation for some time afterwards, but not the influx of animal flocks that would naturally be unaware of the lingering deadly nature of invisible radiation.

Are we on the verge of the fulfillment of Isaiah 17? Obviously no human being can say for certain, at least not without a revelation from the ultimate Author of the prophecy, the God of Israel. I do not claim to have such a revelation. However having studied this prophecy for over 35 years, and given my work as a journalist for three decades in this roiling region at the center of the world, I would say the prospects are now quite high. Would this be the possible opening scene in another prophecy found in Ezekiel 38 and 39 as some suggest? I personally do not think so, since that prophesied invasion is said to be led by a great power located to the "far north" of Israel, which many, including myself, assume to be Russia. The increasingly autocratic Putin government does not seem ready to intervene militarily at this time to save Assad's widely condemned regime.

Israel is said to be "living securely" in its land (Ezk 38:8) when the massive invasion takes place, which it is clearly not doing at present, with preparations for massive missile strikes from Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas and possibly Syria, ongoing. Also the main goal of the invasion foretold by Ezekiel's pen is revealed to be the destruction of Israel, which does not seem to be in the current interests of the Kremlin. Putin and his comrades surely know that any such Russian invasion would undoubtedly spark off a worldwide nuclear showdown with NATO nations, not to mention with Israel itself. More than that, the massive invasion forecast by Ezekiel, also involving Libya and possibly Sudan along with Iran, ends with the *salvation of all Israel* and the divine ingathering to Israel of all Jews living outside of the Jewish state (Ezk 39: 27-28). These seem to be occurrences set to unfold at the *conclusion* of the prophesied end-time "Great Tribulation," also know as the time of Jacob's Troubles, and not at its beginning. Note also how closely the description of what occurs to the invading armies in Ezekiel's prophecy dovetails with what is predicted to occur in the New Testament book of Revelation at the end of the final battle of Armageddon.

Psalms 83 is said to involve eight regional enemies of Israel who "conspire together" to destroy the Jewish state. I noted in *Israel in Crisis* that seven of the ten named conspirators were located in what is today the Arab country of Jordan, along with northern Saudi Arabia. This indicates to me that as long as the pro-Western Hashemite royal family rules from Amman and holds onto the late King Hussein's 1994 peace treaty with Israel, this prophecy is not ready to be fulfilled.

However with over 100,000 Syrian refugees now pouring into the small, financially troubled country, and with revolution and upheaval sweeping most parts of the Arab world, the chances for instability and political chaos in Jordan increase every day. The ascent of the extremist Muslim Brotherhood to power in Egypt (amazingly facilitated by the US and other Western powers) surely strengthens radical Islamic Arab forces everywhere in the region, with the stepson Hamas movement--which is very popular with many Jordanians who claim Palestinian descent--increasingly active in the country. It should also be noted that even if the Assad regime is somehow overthrown in Syria despite strong support from Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, any replacement Sunni Muslim government seems increasingly likely to be at least as hostile to Israel as Assad has been, meaning the seeming military clash alluded to in Isaiah 17 would remain an active possibility at any time. Of course, a military strike by Israel and/or the United States and its allies upon Iran's multiple nuclear sites--increasingly likely as defiant Tehran digs in its heels--could spark off a regional war that ends with the destruction of Damascus. Only time will tell, but with the way things appear at present, it might not be a *long time!*

As I've written before, I suspect that Psalm 83 might be the Arab world's ultimate response to an Israeli destruction of Damascus, which is one of Islam's holiest cities on earth. However it is certainly possible that some future war will begin with Isaiah 17 and then be quickly followed by the joint anti-Israel attack plan unveiled in Psalm 83 (which historians also say never took place in ancient times), or vice versa. Only the Good Lord knows for sure. One thing is certain...the Middle East is currently reeling like it has not done since at least 1973. That being the undeniable case, thank you for your prayers, and may the will of the Sovereign Lord be done on earth even as it is in heaven!

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HOLY WAR FOR THE PROMISED LAND (Broadman & Holman), his latest book, is an overview of the history of the Israel and of the bitter Arab-Israeli conflict that rages there, plus some autobiographical details about the author's experiences living in the land since 1980. It especially examines the important role that militant Islam plays in the conflict.

ISRAEL IN CRISIS: WHAT LIES AHEAD? (Baker/Revell), which examines the political and biblical prospects for a regional attack upon Israel, settlement in the disputed territories, and related topics, is also available for purchase, along with an updated edition of his popular end-time novel, THE END OF DAYS (21st Century Press).

You may order these books at a special discount price by visiting his web site at www.ddolan.com, or by phoning toll free 888-890-6938 in North America, or by e mail at: resources@yourisraelconnection.org

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