



Lebanon War Uncovers Islamic Divisions

The Arab World is being Pulled Apart by Iranian Extremism

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Welcome to another edition of the Bible in the News with Paul Billington speaking with you from Canada.

As we speak with you this week, the world is watching to see if the Lebanon cease-fire will hold, whether the United Nations can do what it has been asked to do, whether the Olmert Government of Israel can survive--and basically, where do things go from here.

What is not being so openly discussed, is the under-currents now at work in the Arab and Islamic world. Under-currents that could yet affect the future of the Middle East every bit as much as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that absorbs all the attention.

While at this stage every effort is being made to paper over the cracks appearing in the Islamic world, the fact is that those cracks are becoming rifts. There is a polarization taking place between the more moderate Islamic nations and the fanatical extremists. An article in the Cairo based Al-Ahram weekly (July 27-August 2) sketched the situation following the move by Saudi Arabia to publicly blame Hizbullah for the "reckless" actions leading up to the Lebanon war.

The article speaks of "serious tensions between Syria and the Riyadh-Cairo alignment." Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt "are departing from their alliance with Syria, which has been a defining component of Middle Eastern politics since the 1990's" says the paper.

The following paragraph, taken from the Al-Ahram article, gives us a clear picture of the situation that exists:

"The anti-Hizbullah position taken by Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan mirrors the real fears felt among some Arab governments with regard to the growing Iranian influence in the region. Against the background of the rise to power of pro-Iranian Shia groups in Iraq, King Abdullah of Jordan has repeatedly warned of the emergence of a 'Shia crescent' in the Middle East. Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal recently criticized the Bush administration for destroying Iraq and letting Iran dominate its political landscape. President Mubarak, in a widely debated statement a few months ago, accused Shia communities in the Arab world of prioritizing their religious allegiance to Iran over the bond of nationalism in their countries. Iranian nuclear ambitions have added to Arab fears, especially in the Gulf. For the Saudi, Egyptian and Jordanian governments, Hizbullah is, beside its pro-Syrian attitude, a client of the Iranian regime that



Map shows religious divisions between Shia and Sunni in the Islamic world. There are pockets of extremist Shia (Shiites) marked by dots throughout.

advances Iran's destabilizing agenda in the Middle East and should therefore be contained. Significantly enough, Saudi Arabia and Egypt declared for the first time in the Arab League meeting on 15 July their endorsement of disarming Hizbullah based on the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1559."

So the governments of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the Gulf States are fearful of the growing threat from what is called the "Islamist movement." The emergence of Hamas in the Palestinian areas, and Hizbullah in Lebanon is cause for great concern in the more moderate states.

The "Middle East Times" (August 4) also drew attention to this under the headline: "Controversial anti-Hizbullah fatwa sparks Saudi debate."

On August 3rd, Saudi police broke up a pro-Hizbullah rally because the Saudi authorities fear that a growing Hizbullah influence could threaten the stability of several Arab monarchies. As Hizbullah appeared to be gaining popularity after the Lebanon-Israeli cease-fire however, there was a marked swing away from the anti-Hizbullah approach clearly revealing the deep fear that these Arabian countries have.

All this is now being debated in the moderate Arab countries. On the one hand there is the growing popularity of the Islamist movements coupled with the emergence of Iranian military threats and a soon to be, nuclear capability. On the other hand there are the strong links (if not alliances) with the United States and the Western World who may decide to confront militant Iran and Syria. Whose side would Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia rather be on?

And no one can be quite sure that some incident might not provide the spark which sets the whole region alight. As THE JERUSALEM POST (August 24) declared, quoting a "senior source"--"Israel may have to go it alone" on Iran. The "source" said:

"...there was a need to understand that 'when push comes to shove,' Israel would have to be prepared to 'slow down' the Iranian nuclear threat by itself."

Well, it seems that the reality is that some Arab countries would not be too upset if Israel, or someone (anyone!) would remove the Iranian threat. These Arab countries are far more concerned about protecting their own skin, than they are about wiping Israel off the map. In fact, if Israel took action to remove the sword that is hanging over their regimes, they would be only too thankful--whatever they say in public.

Nor is it surprising, in view of all this, that Saudi Arabia has entered into a 10 billion pound deal for defence equipment with Great Britain (That is 18.8 billion U.S. dollars!). This involves a lot of cash. It also involves a clear declaration of interests in forming an alliance with the West rather than with Islamist extremists such as exists in Iran. After all, who does Saudi Arabia fear, that she wants so much military hardware?

The Bible has told us over a long time to look for a latter-day group of nations involving the Arabian "Sheba and Dedan" and the trading nations. Ezekiel 38:13 requires the existence of such a group at the time of the end. Without any doubt this refers to Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, and the English-speaking countries such as the United States and Great Britain. The context in Ezekiel's prophecy describes a divided Islamic world, with the Persian Iran and others on one side, and the Sheba-Dedan group on the other. Daniel 11:40-45 gives us a scene showing a similar division, with a king of the north and a king of the south. A divided Islamic world is therefore to be expected on the basis of such prophecies.

You see: the Bible is in the News, but very few people are aware of it. As a matter of fact it is telling us about the news of the



King Abdullah of Jordan warns of a "Shia Crescent" in the Middle East

future as well. Not only do we find Sheba and Dedan (Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States) linked with Britain (Tarshish) in Ezekiel's 38th chapter, but they are also linked together in Psalm 72:10. This looks ahead to the time when Christ will have returned and will have established the kingdom. In this passage the kings of Tarshish and of the isles are seen as bringing tribute, together with the kings of Sheba and Seba.

Another prophecy that links Tarshish together with Arabian countries is Isaiah chapter 60. Speaking of the "forces" (that is more correctly "wealth") of the Gentiles being brought to Israel in the future, the Arabian countries of Midian, Sheba, Kedar etc, are identified in verses 6 and 7. Then Tarshish is mentioned in verse 9. So again an Anglo-Arabian alliance of some kind is indicated here.

Relationships always have their ups and downs of course, and that is to be expected here--but the general picture is clear and we can therefore expect to see a relationship develop between the English-speaking trading nations and these Arabian countries. Iran, Syria and those that make up what Jordan's King Abdullah called the "shia crescent" are to form a different block--and so we shall see the development of a king of the north and a king of the south. There will come into being a north-south division of nations, just as we saw an east-west division in Europe following World War II.

What will actually solidify this alignment is something that events themselves will yet reveal. It may be that the challenge currently being posed by Iran will have to be faced. As we pointed out last week, the western powers (led by the United States and Britain) do not want such a confrontation, and are rather fearful of it--but it may become unavoidable. We must wait and see.

We must continue to watch the Bible in the News--and so with that in mind we will talk with you again next week, God willing.
