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What is Iran's Apocalyptic End Game?

By Tal Davis

The events of the past several weeks have reminded the world of several "inconvenient" truths. That is to say, the world has been shaken into a new realization that certain facts about the state of humanity are still as true today as in the ancient past. Unless you have been asleep for the past three weeks you already know that on Saturday, October 7th, exactly fifty years after the Yom Kippur War of 1973, 2500 agents of the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas ("zeal," "strength," or "bravery") from the Gaza Strip attacked Israel. The terrorists ruthlessly murdered more than a thousand Israeli men, women, and children, and took nearly two hundred hostages. As I write this article the fighting between Hamas and the Israeli Defense Force is now raging in Gaza and its surroundings.

But this is not new information to most of you. And neither is the fact that Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah (the "Army of God"), another terrorist group in southern Lebanon on Israel's northern border, are financed and armed by the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this article we are going to focus on just why Iran is hell bent on the destruction of Israel, and why, for the last three decades, it has been trying to obtain or develop nuclear weapons. It is clear Iran is not doing so for peaceful purposes. If Iran's leaders would cease their threats against their country's neighbors and their open hatred of Israel and the United States, they could live peacefully and prosper. But because of the virulent rhetoric and support of Islamic terrorism around the world, they have been under strict economic embargos for years.

But what is at the root of all their hate and belligerence? To understand that we have to understand the heart of the kind of Islam that the Mullahs (the religious leaders of Iran) believe and teach. The vast majority of people in Iran are adherents of Shi'a Islam. Shi'a is actually a minority sect of world Islam, claiming only about 15% of all Muslims. Shi'a Muslims are called Shiites, most of whom live in Iran and Iraq. About 85% of all Muslims follow Sunni Islam, which is far more widespread worldwide. To understand the difference between these two divisions of Islam we need to review a bit of history.

Islam was founded by Muhammad (A.D. 570-632) in the Seventh Century A.D. in Arabia (now Saudi Arabia). Following his death, conflicts arose over who should be Muhammad's successor as Caliph (leader) of the movement. He had left no designated replacement.

Muhammad's followers chose his cousin Abu Bakr as the first Caliph. However, he only lived about one year thereafter (d. 634). He was followed by Umar (634-644). The third Caliph was Uthman (d. 656), a son-in-law of Muhammad. He was followed by another son-in-law of Muhammad named Ali ibn Abi Talib, the husband of Muhammad's daughter Fatima by his first wife Khadija. In 661, Ali was murdered. He was followed as Caliph by Mu'awiya.

At that time, major disagreements arose among Muslims over how the Islamic leader should be chosen. Those who favored the continued Caliphate system became known as the Sunnis (Traditionalists). They believed that the headship of Islam was to be based on a consensus of Muslim faithful and scholars. In

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time, however, as Islam spread and its numbers grew, the unity of a central Caliphate was lost since no consensus could be determined. Only the basic religious ideas continue to unite Sunnis and no single leader was designated.

Meanwhile, other Muslims asserted that the leaders of Islam, which they termed "Imams," had to be direct descendants of Muhammad through the line of Fatima (his first wife). Thus, Ali' was regarded as their first Imam. They rejected the divine authority of the three Caliphs who had preceded him. Thus, they became known as the "Shi'a Ali" or "Party of Ali". In their view, the second true Imam was Ali's oldest son, and Muhammad's grandson, Hasan (d. 669). Hassan was followed in 662 by his younger brother, Husayn. Husayn was killed by Sunnis in the Battle of Karbala in 680 while trying to reunite all Muslims under his leadership. To this day, Shiites regard Husayn as a great martyr for their faith. Each year in Iran, a national day of remembrance is held in his honor.

Ali, Hasan, and Husayn, according to Shiite doctrine, were followed by nine other true Imams. Most Shiites believe their were a total of twelve legitimate Imams over a span of 268 years. Here is a list of the Twelve Imams of Shiite Islam, along with the dates of their births and deaths.

1. Ali ibn Abu Talib (600-661)
2. Hasan ibn (son of) Ali (624-669)
3. Husayn ibn Ali (626-680)
4. Ali ibn Husayn (658-712)
5. Muhammad ibn Ali (677-732)
6. Ja'far ibn Muhammad (702-765)
7. Musa ibn Ja'far (744-799)
8. Ali ibn Musa (765-817)
9. Muhammad ibn Ali (810-835)
10. Ali ibn Muhammad (827-868)
11. Hasan ibn Ali (846-874)
12. Muhammad ibn al-Hasan (868-?)

Notice that there is a question mark where the date of the twelfth Imam's, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan, death should be stated. That is because in 874 he disappeared, never to be heard from again. No one knows when he died. The problem for Shiites was that he left no living heir from the line of Muhammad to succeed him as Imam. Consequently, some Shiites created the myth of what they call his "Occultation" (hiddenness). That is to say, they believe he went into hiding and actually did not die. They claim he is still alive somewhere and in the last days will return as the "Mahdi" or "The Guided One." Believers in this myth are called "Twelvers." They believe that in the end times the Mahdi will lead the armies of Islam to final victory over the forces of Satan (i.e.: any person, country, religion [especially Christians and Jews], or army not embracing Islam) and bring about the final judgment of the world. So, in some sense, they regard the Twelfth Imam's return in the same way Christians believe Jesus will return to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Many Twelver Shiites today are convinced that the time for his return is imminent. They are persuaded that the events since the 1979 Iranian revolution that brought Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989) and the radical Shiite Mullahs into power in Iran was the beginning of what might be called the "last days" leading to last great war and the return of the Mahdi.

The current rulers of Iran, including its President Ebrahim Raisi and Supreme Leader (Mullah) Ali Khamenei (the country's de facto ruler) are believers in the Twelver myth. This is the key to understanding Iran's belligerent attitude toward the western world (the U.S. in particular) and Israel. Most Muslims have an inherent anti-Semitic (anti-Jewish) perspective going back hundreds of years. The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 in what was called Palestine further ignited that anger.

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So this leads to several important questions. Does the current Iranian Islamic regime see itself as the catalyst for the great conflagration that will immediately precede the Twelfth Imam's return? Is that why it continues to fan the flames of terror in the Middle East and elsewhere around the world? Is that why it is determined to procure nuclear weapons? We have to keep in mind that the leaders of that country are religious fanatics who are steeped in the doctrines of Twelver Shi'a Islam. If an apocalyptic war begins, they believe their victory is inevitable as it is the will of Allah. The Iranian Twelver Mullahs are true believers. They believe it is certain that a final war will come and the Mahdi will come out of hiding. Every decision they make, every policy they establish, every military terrorist movement they support, is based on that proposition.

That being said, Israel has a sort of apocalyptic scenario of its own. It is said that, in its early years, Israel swore that if faced with ultimate defeat, it would fight to the last person rather than surrender. They called it the "Masada Option," named for the Jews who committed mass suicide rather than to surrender to the Romans in A.D. 73. Over the past three decades, however, that has changed to the "Samson Option," named for Samson, who in one last strike brought down the temple on his captors. The Israelis now have nuclear weapons, so if they ever face ultimate military defeat they will use those weapons as a

last option to completely destroy their enemies.

So where do we, as Christians and Americans, fit into all this confusion? First of all, we need to pray for peace. Remember, God is ultimately in control, even of world events. Only when Jesus returns will real peace finally come to the world. Second, as Americans, we need to work to eliminate the threat of terrorism, both here in our country and abroad. As long as countries like Iran continue to fund and supply terrorist organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah, people in Israel and elsewhere (including the USA) will never be safe. And third, we must never allow Iran to obtain nuclear weapons. Given the fanatical religious mindset of that country's leadership, it is reasonable to assume they will regard them as gifts from Allah to bring about the end of the world and the return of the Twelfth Imam.

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