

Mapping recent events in Iran onto Bible prophecy

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Recent events in Iran have shown that it is against Israel and has the support of Russia. This matches Bible prophecy about Iran. Also, recent unrest in the Iranian province of Khuzestan may have particular significance in relation to Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the revival of Elam.

WHEN SPEAKING of the Russian Gog, the Spirit through Ezekiel wrote: "And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords: Persia, Ethiopia and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet" (38:4,5). Of these armies it is written that they will come "against the mountains of Israel" (v. 8). Persia corresponds to modern Iran. We would, therefore, expect Iran to be against Israel and for Russia. In this article we will consider these two aspects. We will also consider developments relating to Elam.

Against Israel

At a recent conference in Teheran entitled *A World without Zionism*, the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said, "Israel must be wiped off the map".¹ Unsurprisingly, the statement was condemned by the international community. The West already has concerns relating to Iran's nuclear programme, its support for Palestinian radicals and its alleged help in providing bomb-making technology to insurgents in Iraq. His words have inflamed an already tense diplomatic stand-off.

There are several factors, however, which need to be taken into account when considering this statement. Firstly, from the president's perspective the statement was nothing new. As he himself said, he was simply quoting words originally uttered by the late Ayatollah Khomeini. Secondly, the statement is in some ways just a manifestation of the current confidence of Ahmadinejad and his fellow hardliners. This confidence is borne of his recent success in elections. His confidence has also

been strengthened by record oil revenues, boosted by the instability in Iraq and the consequent rise in oil prices. The difficulties faced by the United States in Iraq have also given confidence to Ahmadinejad.

A third factor to be noted is that the views of Ahmadinejad do not necessarily represent the definitive foreign policy of Iran. Some in Iran sought to play down his comments. Moreover, the current Ayatollah, Ali Khamenei, has previously taken steps to counterbalance the hard-line president. For example, following the president's defiant speech at the United Nations in September, the Ayatollah increased the power of the Expediency Council, a body which supervises the government.

However, despite the foregoing caveats, the views Ahmadinejad expressed have much popular support amongst the Iranian people. There is no question that Iran is an enemy of Israel. As the journalists Ewen MacAskill and Chris McGreal stated: "Israel views Iran as its main security threat in the Middle East".² In Daniel 7 the ancient Persian Empire was likened to a bear and commanded to "devour much flesh" (v. 5). Iran's desire to see Israel devoured out of existence shows that in the latter days it is also manifesting the characteristic of a bear.

For Russia

With regard to his allies Gog is commanded, "be thou a guard unto them" (Ezek. 38:7). Russia continues to work closely with Iran by helping to guard her interests. This has been shown recently in relation to satellite and rocket technology.

On 3 November 2005 the first Iranian satellite, Sina-1, was launched. The satellite was the result of joint work between Iran and Russia. The satellite was built by a Russian company in Siberia and was launched from Plesetsk in northern Russia

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1. MacAskill, E. and McGreal, C. (2005), "Israel should be wiped off map, says Iran's president", *The Guardian*, 27 Oct., p. 17.
 2. *Ibid.*

using a Russian Kosmos 3M rocket. The main stated purpose of the satellite is to take photographs of Iran to aid in the monitoring of agricultural and natural resources.³

The North Koreans have developed a missile called the Taepo Dong 2 missile. Its design is based on an original submarine-launched missile formerly used by the Soviet military. The missile can be modified to be fired from land. According to the reporter Con Coughlin, the technology associated with these modifications has been passed from North Korea to Iran using the Russians as go-betweens. The rocket has a range of 2,200 miles and this would enable Iran to hit a target as far west as France. Coughlin says that "Russians have provided production facilities, diagrams and operating instruction so the missile can be built in Iran".⁴ The

Russians involved are former members of the armed forces. The Russian government denies all knowledge of any deal between North Korea and Iran involving rocket technology. However, according to Western intelligence, the Russian officers are acting with the support of the Russian foreign intelligence service, the FSB.

These two examples show that Russia is truly being a "guard" to Iran. In addition to this, there is the ongoing support Russia is providing to help Iran develop nuclear power. In view of its nuclear ambitions, there have been calls for Iran to be referred to the United Nations. Following President Ahmadinejad's outburst concerning Israel, the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, stated: "I have to admit that those who insist on transferring the Iranian nuclear dossier to the United Nations Security Council have received an additional argument to do so".⁵ However, despite feeling obliged to distance itself from Ahmadinejad's remarks, Russia remains a close ally of Iran.

Elam

Jeremiah wrote: "But it shall come to pass in the latter days, that I will bring again the captivity of Elam, saith the LORD [Yahweh]" (49:39). Elam is sometimes interpreted as simply an alternative way of referring to Persia. However, Elam and Persia are two distinct areas. In the days of Daniel, Persia was a kingdom (10:13) and Elam was a province within that kingdom (8:2). Therefore,



Map illustrating the location of the Iranian province of Khuzestan, which corresponds to the ancient nation of Elam, later incorporated into the Persian Empire.

in prophecies relating to the time of the end, we should not treat Persia and Elam as referring exactly to the same area.

According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Elam was an "ancient country in southwestern Iran approximately equivalent to the modern region of Khuzestan" (see map).⁶ Therefore, given Jeremiah's prophecy of the revival of Elam in the latter days, we should be watching this area with interest to see if a distinct Elamite identity emerges within Iran. The BBC has reported recent unrest in Khuzestan.⁷ The province has a strong Arabic population, and in June there were protests against plans by the government to encourage more ethnic Iranians to live in the province. In the latest unrest, 200 protesters gathered in the city of Ahvaz, shouting anti-government slogans and attacking police. It remains to be seen if these protests will lead to further developments.

3. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4381436.stm.
4. Coughlin, C. (2005), "Russians help Iran with missile threat to Europe", *Sunday Telegraph*, 16 Oct., p. 1.
5. La Guardia, A., Helm, T. and Rennie, D. (2005), "We will use force, Blair warns Iranians", *Daily Telegraph*, 28 Oct., p. 8.
6. "Elam", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2005. Encyclopaedia Britannica Premium Service, 11 Nov. 2005, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9032222>.
7. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4410506.stm.