

Publishing Editor's column

IN THIS column in December I referred to a possible scenario for the outbreak of war in the Middle East: an attack by Jewish extremists on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Since then, this possibility has come to the fore. Two readers have referred to a report on the BBC Radio 4 programme Today that a former head of the Israeli Secret Service and a former head of the Jerusalem Police Force have warned the Israeli Government of plots by extremist groups to blow up the Muslim holy places on the Temple Mount. This report was reinforced soon after in the fortnightly Israeli magazine Jerusalem Report, which carried an interview with the director of an Israeli 'watchdog' group, who warned of the same danger.

The details given in this report are quite amazing. In 1990 a conference of organisations interested in the Temple Mount attracted just sixty people. In August 2000 50,000 Jews gathered, apparently to demonstrate in favour of a Jewish presence on the Mount. In January 2001 250,000 people demonstrated against proposals by retiring US President Bill Clinton (and accepted by the then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak) to split the Old City of Jerusalem between Jew and Arab, with some kind of joint control over the Temple Mount. This growing emphasis upon God's holy city is, of course just what we expect from Bible prophecy. As for the threat of terrorist attacks, the interviewee asserts that there have been eight or nine foiled attempts to do this already.

The last few weeks have seen three important changes amongst the leadership of the nations. One, the fall from grace of Peter Mandelson, seems to have little relevance to Israel (although Mr Mandelson is of Jewish ancestry), but is significant because it removes from office the strongest proponent of Britain's entry into the euro, a man hitherto regarded as one of the most influential men in the government. Another is the unexpected arrival, and in the most unusual circumstances, of George Bush Junior into the presidency of the USA. The real significance of this is yet to be seen, but it certainly appears that he will take America further from Europe, and will adopt a harder line towards Iraq, which could contribute to renewed Arab aggression against Israel.

The third significant change is, of course, the triumph of the hard-line Ariel Sharon over Ehud Barak in the recent elections for prime minister in Israel. It is less than two years since Barak swept to power with a big majority; now he has been replaced by a man thought only a few months ago to be unelectable. Clearly his proposal for a massive give-away of portions of the Land is not in God's purpose. How things will develop we must wait and see. The doomsayers are forecasting renewed war, brought about by the Palestinians' despair at achieving their aims. An attack on the Temple Mount might be the trigger for this. Such a war may well be necessary to achieve Israeli dominance over the Arabs before they are finally humbled. But the last few weeks have certainly proved one thing: the Most High still rules in the kingdom of men, and leaders rise and fall so that His purpose is carried out.

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