

we do see the larger picture. Christ said: "Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?" (Lk. 12:56). We need to keep our

vision of the Kingdom strong so that we do not lose sight of the fact that what is going on is the preparation of the world for the return of Christ.

Russia, Iran and nuclear cooperation

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IN EZEKIEL 38 some of the countries that will be with the forces of Gog when the invasion of Israel takes place are listed: "Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet" (v. 5). The country of Persia roughly corresponds to the modern-day country of Iran. As Persia will be "with" Gog we can expect to see signs of Russia and Iran cooperating in the days leading up to the return of Christ. Recent evidence of this has come to light in relation to the building of nuclear reactors.

The Times of 2 August 2002 stated: "America and Russia clashed yesterday over new Russian plans to build five more nuclear reactors in Iran, which Washington claims will be used by the Islamic republic to develop nuclear weapons".¹ In May the US had previously raised concerns about a Russian project to build a nuclear reactor at a facility at Bushehr on the Gulf coast. The new plans, which were quietly announced by Russia on its official government Internet site, involve building three more additional reactors at Bushehr and two more at a new power station at Akhvaz, which is around sixty-five miles from the Iraqi border.

When the announcement was originally made the US did not initially comment. It is said that they were probably "too stunned". The issue was eventually raised by Spencer Abraham, the US Energy Secretary, whilst on a visit to Moscow.

As well as suspecting that Russia is helping Iran to produce nuclear weapons, something which Russia denies, the US is also concerned about Russian support for the development of weapons of mass destruction in general. The *Financial Times* commented:

"Separately, Alexander Vershbow, the US ambassador to Moscow, said his country had concerns about 'potential assistance' provided

by Russia to Iran for the development of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, as well as the transfer of advanced conventional weapons".²

The close cooperation between Russia and Iran is in line with what we would expect from Ezekiel 38. What is also of note is the way the US is positioning itself firmly in opposition to this linkage. This fits in with its role as a young lion of Tarshish (Ezek. 38:13). We might not be surprised that the US should take this line, and perhaps we see it as inevitable. But we should not allow our senses to be dulled by its apparent inevitability. Its inevitability is a measure of the extent to which the signs of the times have progressed towards the final consummation of God's purpose.

Central to Ezekiel 38 and God's purpose is, of course, Israel. Israel has been quick to align itself with the US. *The Times* stated: "American fears have been seconded by Israel, which in 1981 sent bombers to destroy a nuclear reactor near Baghdad. Ariel Sharon, Prime Minister of Israel, predicted recently that Iran would be a nuclear power by 2005".³

Ezekiel 38 shows that the concerns of the US and Israel with regard to cooperation between Russia and Iran are well founded. Yet in the end the only way this threat will be dealt with will be through the return of Christ, who, when all hope for Israel seems lost (37:11), will deliver God's people from those who gather against them.

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1. Shepherd, R. (2002), "'Stunned' US tells Putin its nuclear fear of Iran", *The Times*, 2 Aug., p. 16.
 2. Jack, A. (2002), "US attacks Russia over Iran 'arms' programme", *Financial Times*, 2 Aug., p. 6.
 3. *Op. cit.*