

Newsbytes

The First Watch

June 28, 2017

No. 827

Since 2001

Newzbytes is a ministry of Calvary Chapel of Appleton

www.ccapleton.org

“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

Why Iran and Israel may be on the verge of conflict — in Syria

By Benny Avni June 27, 2017

nypost.com

TEL AVIV — Some Israelis like to go to the Golan, where from the safety of a ramp overlooking the valley below, they can watch — no binoculars needed — the most consequential regional event of the age: the Syrian civil war.

This week, however, the Israel Defense Forces closed the area for visitors, letting in only the local farmers who worried about missing the cherry harvest.

That’s because for three days in a row, mortar shells flew across the border onto the Israeli-controlled side of the Golan, putting war gawkers at too much risk.

Most likely, the shells overflow their real target: one of the sides in the increasingly heated battle in an area around Quneitra, a town divided between Israel and Syria. Various Sunni militias are entrenched in the area, and Syrian forces loyal to Bashar al-Assad are trying to clear them out.

Control of the road between Quneitra and Dara to the south (where the uprising against Assad started six years ago) is key for the Syrian army — and even more so for its patrons in Tehran. By capturing this road, and the area east of Israel and north of Jordan, they can establish a land corridor from Iran, through Iraq, to Damascus and Syria’s neighbor, Lebanon.

Throw in Yemen, and Iran’s dream of a “Shiite crescent” that would make it the Mideast’s dominant force comes true.

The Syria war is complex, involving many powers pulling in all directions. But Iran and its allied militias — Shiite Iraqis, foreigners from Afghanistan and elsewhere, Hezbollah, Assad’s army — have emerged as a chief worry for policymakers in Riyadh, Amman and Jerusalem.

True, Israel knows how to handle spillover from war on its border. IDF surgical strikes hit Syrian army targets over the past few days, which was enough to at least pause the cross-border seepage of fire into the Golan.

The larger concern for Israeli policymakers here is that Iran and its allied militias, already in control of south Lebanon, are trying to cement a beachhead in Syria.

It’s not just Syria. IDF intelligence chief Herzi Halevi said Iran is also building arms factories in Lebanon, a country now dominated by its local proxy, Hezbollah. The mullahs, he said, similarly use Yemeni proxies, the Houthis, to manufacture weapons in that strategically located country next door to Saudi Arabia.

So where’s America in all this?

The Obama administration considered Iran an ally in the fight against ISIS. That, and the nuclear deal that filled the mullahs' coffers with cash, worried the Saudis so much that they quietly turned to Israel as an ally to confront Tehran.

And not only Saudis. Ha'aretz reports Jordan and Israel have tightened intelligence cooperation in recent weeks to better address the growing Iranian threat on Syrian territory near both countries' borders.

US forces are reportedly also operating there in growing numbers. Better yet, President Trump has made clear his predecessor's romance with Tehran was just a fling. The administration has been warning Iran to watch its step as it stomps around the Middle East.

That may have been behind the seemingly-out-of-the-blue White House announcement Monday, confirmed by the Pentagon Tuesday, that it's detected signs Syria is preparing a new chemical attack. Trump officials warned Assad would pay a "heavy price" for using chemical weapons again.

Yet, widely reported internal fights among administration bigwigs over America's involvement in the Syria war could hamstring the united anti-Iran front that Sunni allies are hoping for. Washington's bickering over Trump's alleged ties to Russia, an Iran ally, isn't helping either.

According to a Fox News report, Trump is quietly organizing a regional conference, inviting Sunni allies and perhaps even Israel. If so, good — but administration officials will surely hear a lot about the need for America to take a clear stand against Iran's expansion.

The region is on edge. A victory over ISIS seems close now, but if Iran emerges on top, a wider and more vicious war may ensue, with dire consequences for everyone, including America.

For Israelis, meanwhile, such an outcome could be much scarier than what happened this week to a few Golan tourists that temporarily lost a front-row seat for watching the war below.

Why Israel has the most technologically advanced military on Earth

By Yaakov Katz January 29, 2017 nypost.com



In 1950, just two years after the state of Israel was founded, the country's first commercial delegation set off for South America.

Israel desperately needed trading partners. Unlike its Arab adversaries, Israel did not have natural resources to fund its economy. There was no oil or minerals. Nothing.

The delegation held a couple of meetings but was mostly met with laughs. The Israelis were trying to sell oranges, kerosene stove tops and fake teeth. For countries like Argentina, which grew its own oranges and was connected to the electrical grid, the products were pretty useless.

It's hard to imagine this is what Israeli exports looked like a mere 67 years ago. Today, Israel is a high-tech superpower and one of the world's top weapons exporters with approximately \$6.5 billion in annual arms sales.

Since 1985, for example, Israel is the world's largest exporter of drones, responsible for about 60 percent of the global market, trailed by the US, whose market share is under 25 percent. Its customers are everywhere —

Russia, South Korea, Australia, France, Germany and Brazil.

In 2010, for example, five NATO countries were flying Israeli drones in Afghanistan. How did this happen? How did Israel, a country not yet even 70 years old, become a superpower with one of the most technologically advanced militaries in the world that is changing the way modern wars are fought?

The answer, I believe, is a combination of a number of national characteristics unique to Israel.

First, despite Israel's small size, about 4.5 percent of its GDP is spent on research and development, almost twice the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development average. Of that amount, about 30 percent goes to products of a military nature. By comparison, only 2 percent of German R&D and 17 percent of the US R&D is for the military.

Another major contribution is the culture of innovation and creativity in Israel. Israelis are more willing to take risks than other nations. They get this from their compulsory military service during which they are tasked, at a young age, to carry out missions often with deadly consequences.

While Israeli 19-year-olds embark on operations behind enemy lines, their Western counterparts can be found in the safety of their college dormitories.

Lastly, Israel has been in a perpetual state of conflict since its inception, fighting a war almost every decade. This reality, of having your back up against the wall, sharpens the mind. It forces Israelis to be creative and come up with innovative ways and weapons to survive.

This is the Israel story ...

Robotic border patrols

The Guardium is a part of a new category of robotic weapons known as Unmanned Ground Vehicles or UGVs. Israel is the first country in the world using these robots to replace soldiers on missions like border patrols.

Already, Guardium UGVs are deployed along Israel's border with Syria in the north and the Gaza Strip in the south.

The Guardium is based on a Tomcar dune-buggy-like vehicle and equipped with a range of sensors, cameras and weapons. It can be driven by a soldier sitting in a command center miles away or receive a pre-designated route for its patrol, making it completely autonomous.

The increasing use of robots by the Israel Defense Forces is part of a larger strategy to minimize risk to soldiers when possible. In addition, soldiers require breaks, food and water. All a Guardium needs is a full tank of gas. Other UGVs in use by the IDF include the Segev, which is based on a Ford F-350 pickup truck.

Facing terrorists who use tunnels to infiltrate into Israel from places like the Gaza Strip, Israel is also relying on UGVs like robotic snakes to slither their way into underground passageways and enemy headquarters. The robots will then map out the structures, giving soldiers an accurate picture of a battle area before the place is stormed.

The same is happening at sea. Israeli defense contractor Rafael has developed an unmanned patrol ship called Protector which is being used by Israel to protect its strategic ports and patrol the country's long Mediterranean coastline.

The Arrow anti-missile program

In 2000, the Israeli air force received its first operational Arrow missile battery, making Israel the first country in the world with an operational system that could shoot down incoming enemy missiles.

The idea to create the Arrow was born in the mid-1980s after President Ronald Reagan floated his Star Wars plan and asked America's allies to partner in developing systems that could protect the country from Soviet nuclear missiles.

The Arrow was a revolutionary idea. Due to Israel's small size and lack of territory, all ballistic missiles deployed in the region — Syria, Iraq and Iran — can reach anywhere within the country and pose a strategic and possibly even existential threat. Israel, the developers argued, needed a system that could shoot down enemy missiles over neighboring countries and provide overall protection for the tiny Jewish state.

The program had its ups and downs but got a huge boost in funding after the First Gulf War in 1991, when Saddam Hussein fired 39 Scuds into Israel, paralyzing the country and forcing millions of Israelis into bomb shelters with their gas masks.

The Arrow was just the beginning. Today, Israel has the Arrow, which is partially funded by the United States, to intercept long-range ballistic missiles, David's Sling to intercept medium-range rockets and cruise missiles as well as the combat-proven Iron Dome, which has intercepted hundreds of Katyusha rockets fired from the Gaza Strip in recent years.

Israel is the only country in the world that has used missile defense systems in times of war. These systems do more than just save lives. They also give the country's leadership "diplomatic maneuverability," the opportunity to think and strategize before retaliating against rocket attacks.

While other countries have also invested in missile defense, none has created a multi-tier architecture like Israel.

Mini spy satellites

In 1988, Israel launched its first spy satellite into space, gaining membership in the exclusive club of just eight nations with independent satellite-launching capabilities.

From the beginning, there were those who doubted Israel was capable of developing, building and launching its own satellite, but in the nearly 30 years since that day, it has grown into a satellite superpower, now operating eight different spy satellites in space.

This is a critical capability considering the threats Israel faces from countries like Iran, which it still suspects is planning one day to build a nuclear weapon.

Israel has shied away from building big satellites and instead designs what are known as "mini satellites," which weigh about 300 kilograms (661 pounds) in comparison to America's 25-ton satellites.

Israel's spy satellites are split into two categories. Most of Israel's satellites come with advanced high-resolution cameras like the Ofek-9, launched in 2010, which can discern objects as small as 50 centimeters (20 inches) from hundreds of miles away.

Israel's other category of satellites are known as the TecSar. These satellites use a synthetic aperture sensor, basically a radar system that can create high-resolution images at almost the same quality as a regular camera.

The advantage this technology provides Israel is tremendous. A camera cannot see through clouds or fog, but radars can work in all weather conditions and can even see through camouflage nets. What this means is that Israel has the ability to track its enemies and gather intelligence on them at all times of the day and through rain, fog or clouds.

Israel's success in developing state-of-the-art satellites has caught the world's attention. In 2005, the French entered a strategic partnership with an Israeli company to develop a satellite, and in 2012, Italy ordered a reconnaissance satellite, paying \$182 million. Singapore and India have also reportedly purchased Israeli satellites over the years.

Drones

It is referred to in Israel as the “drone that can reach Iran.” The Heron TP is Israel’s largest unmanned aerial vehicle with an 85-foot wingspan, the same as a Boeing 737 airliner. It can stay airborne for 24 hours and carry a 1-ton payload.

While Israel doesn’t openly admit it, the Heron TP is believed to also be capable of launching air-to-surface missiles.

Israel was the first country in the world to operate drones in combat operations. Its first use of drones was in 1969, when the Israel Defense Forces flew toy airplanes with cameras glued to their bellies along the Suez Canal to spy on Egypt. In 1982, it flew its first combat drone, called Scout, in Lebanon, where they played a key role in locating and neutralizing Syrian anti-aircraft missile systems.

That operation caught the world’s attention, and in 1986, Israel supplied the US Navy with its first drone, known as the Pioneer. A few years later, one Pioneer made history when it flew over a group of Iraqi soldiers during the First Gulf War. The soldiers saw the aircraft, took off their white undershirts and waved them in the air. It was the first time in history that a military unit had surrendered to a robot.

Israel’s drones have revolutionized the modern battlefield. They cost a fraction of a manned fighter jet — some as little as a few million dollars — and participate today in every single operation conducted by the IDF.

Drones give soldiers the ability to make calculated decisions before invading territory or storming enemy compounds.

Before Israel bombs a building in the Gaza Strip, for example, it always has a drone in the air to ensure that civilians are not inside. They also reportedly fly almost daily over Lebanon, tracking fighters for Hezbollah, which is believed to have about 130,000 missiles capable of striking Israel.

The top-secret tank

To this day, the Merkava tank is one of Israel’s most top-secret projects. It is said to be one of the most lethal and protected tanks in the world, and its construction started out of pure necessity — the United Kingdom and other countries refused to sell Israel tanks. So in the 1970s, it started to build its own.

The newest model — known as the Merkava Mk-4 — is the most impressive. It can reach speeds of 40 mph and comes with a new modular armor kit, meaning that the tank can be fitted with the armor it needs based on the specific mission it is heading into.

An area, for example, known to be full of anti-tank missile squads requires heavy armor, while an operation without the threat of anti-tank missiles means less. This also allows tank crews to replace damaged pieces of armor on the battlefield without having to bring the full tank back to a repair shop inside Israel.

In 2012, the Merkava underwent its biggest change yet when a new system — called Trophy — was installed on the tank. Trophy is an active-protection system, basically a personal missile defense system for an individual tank.

Trophy uses a miniature radar to detect incoming anti-tank missiles and then fires a cloud of countermeasures — basically metal pellets — to intercept them. The radar also interfaces with the tank’s battle management system. This means that once a missile launch is detected, the coordinates of the enemy squad that fired the missile are immediately obtained, allowing the tank to retaliate quickly and accurately.

Progressive Christianity is as Much of a Threat to Your Kids' Faith as Atheism

crossexamined.org

In our backyard we used to have a beautiful lime tree.

One day I noticed that a thorny vine of some kind had started growing around it. It looked enough like the rest of the tree that I figured it was just another stage of growth. A quick Google search told me thorns often grow around citrus trees, so I didn't think much more about it.

Then, within a couple of months, the thorns took over the tree and it began to die. A gardener looked at it and said these particular thorns weren't part of the tree at all. It turns out they were a foreign invader.

Had the foreign invader looked more foreign, I would have realized the need to uproot it immediately. But because it shared surface-level similarities with the tree, I was fooled into thinking it was all the same thing.

I often write here about the threat hostile atheists pose to kids' faith today. But atheism is not the only threat. In fact, there's a particular threat that can be even more dangerous because it less obviously requires attention. It's like the thorny plant that gradually killed my lime tree because I didn't even realize it was foreign.

That threat is called progressive Christianity.

What is Progressive Christianity?

It can be hard to define progressive Christianity because it's an umbrella term for a lot of different beliefs. But I think my friend and fellow blogger, Alisa Childers (who was once part of a progressive Christian church) hit the nail on the head when she summarized it this way in a recent post:

- A lowered view of the Bible
- Feelings are emphasized over facts
- Essential Christian doctrines are open for reinterpretation
- Historic terms are redefined
- The heart of the gospel message shifts from sin and redemption to social justice

Here's the danger. To the untrained ear, the progressive Christian message can sound a lot like biblical Christianity. There's talk of God, Jesus, the Bible, love, and compassion. If a child has never learned to think more deeply about theology and what the Bible actually teaches, they can easily mistake progressive Christianity for biblical Christianity.

And progressive Christianity often teaches an incomplete or false gospel.

Exhibit A: There's a blog called Unfundamentalist Parenting that promotes parenting according to progressive Christian views. This Easter, the blog featured a guest post by a Children's Pastor at a progressive Christian church. In her post, *The Trouble with Easter: How To (and not to) Talk to Kids about Easter*, the author expressed how difficult Easter is because she doesn't want to teach the kids in her spiritual care that:

Jesus died for you/your sins (this is "psychologically damaging")

God intended for Jesus to die (this is "confusing and jarring")

Jesus died to save them from God's judgment ("an atonement theology of inborn corruption in need of redemption has no place in a conversation with kids about Easter")

The whole article literally made my heart hurt.

Views like these are thorny, foreign invaders in the church.

Why Progressive Christians Don't Like Apologetics

The Unfundamentalist Parenting blog recently featured another post that caught my eye: Why Your Children Do NOT Need Apologetics. (If you're not familiar with the term, apologetics is the study of why there's good reason to believe Christianity is true.) The post is filled with misunderstandings, but my purpose here is not to rebut it. Instead, I want to highlight why progressive Christians don't like apologetics...and why that shows just how important the study of apologetics actually is.

The author bemoans the fact that apologetics "confines faith as doctrine," explaining:

"Our faith is a dynamic experience that shifts and evolves for us and especially for a child growing leaps and bounds in their development. We cannot capture that experience and box it into a set of propositions to memorize and defend—that limits and denies the realities of the human experience."

This statement says so much. The author is confused between the objective, unchanging truth of God and the subjective, changing experiences we have as we relate to God throughout our lives.

God and the truth He has revealed do not shift and evolve.

Our experiences shift and evolve, but that has nothing to do with what is true.

Teaching kids apologetics isn't about putting their experiences in a "box." To the contrary, apologetics is about stepping outside personal experience and examining what reason there is to believe Christianity is true regardless of our feelings.

If kids are only developing a faith based on "shifting and evolving" experiences, they have no way of knowing if their faith is well placed. I could have faith that a mouse will fly out of a tree right now, but that would be a bad thing to have faith in.

Faith, in and of itself, is no virtue.

It's only as solid as the object of the faith.

The question is, how can we be confident that Jesus, as the object of Christian faith, is "solid"?

Apologetics.

Progressive Christians don't like apologetics because it challenges them to think of biblical teachings in a category of objective truth—something we're not free to change just because we happen to "experience" it in varied ways.

Two plus two equals four whether I experience difficulty with that or not.

Experience cannot be elevated over objective truth.

Progressive Christianity is Just One More Reason Your Kids and the Church at Large Desperately Need Apologetics

The study of apologetics is desperately needed for all Christians today, both for engaging with the secular world and, less obviously, for engaging with groups that teach an unbiblical version of Christianity.

But, for some reason, the church is still largely blind to this need.

Cold-Case homicide detective, apologist, and author J. Warner Wallace sees this all the time. He speaks nearly every week at churches and conferences across the country on the reliability of the Gospels, the reasonable

inference of the resurrection, and the evidence for God's existence. Wallace has the opportunity to engage with the spectrum of believers in a way that few others do.

What he's found has been disappointing at best.

In his new book, *Forensic Faith*, Wallace says, "In many of these churches, the people I meet aren't really interested in Christian 'apologetics'...In fact, most are still completely unfamiliar with the word, and some even reject the value of such an effort. On more than one occasion, I've heard a well-meaning believer say something akin to, 'Well, that's nice, but I don't really need any evidence. I just believe Christianity is true.'"

In other words, Christians are largely unprepared to make the case for what they believe and many in the church still deny the need to be prepared in the first place.

The church is asleep.

And while the church sleeps, the secular world marches on, becoming increasingly hostile to the truth of Christianity, and thorny foreign invaders continue to grow within.

For that reason, I don't think there's a more important book for the church right now than *Forensic Faith*. In it, Wallace powerfully makes the case for the importance of apologetics for every Christian. It's a wake up call to the sleeping church.

For those new to apologetics, it's a perfect place to start. Wallace motivates you to take your Christian case-making duty seriously and shows you, step-by-step, what to do once you've accepted that duty.

For those who already understand the importance of apologetics, it's the ultimate resource to share with fellow believers who need the understanding you have. It's the book you can give to your small group members, pastors, children's ministry leaders, and friends.

I pray this fantastic book will truly sweep through the church.

As Christian parents, we must continually be vigilant. Threats to our kids' faith aren't always as obvious as the freeway billboards proclaiming "There is No God." Providing kids with a foundation of apologetics, however, will give them the training of a discerning gardener ready to identify and uproot any kind of invader that shouldn't exist alongside biblical truth.