

From Our Pastor

September 8, 2018

Sabbath Greetings to Everyone!

Nearly half a million people have been killed in Syria's long, grinding war, which began first as a popular uprising against Syrian President Assad. Untold numbers have become refugees as a result of the conflict which devolved into a sectarian and regional conflict involving seven different political entities. The involvement of Russian and US forces set the stage for what some observers warn could be another 1914 scenario. As the war appears to be drawing to an end, things might be getting worse.

CNN reported Friday: "Russia has warned the US military twice in the last week that its forces, along with Syrian regime units, are prepared to attack in an area where dozens of US troops are located, according to several US defense officials." Russia claims that there are militants in the area protected by US troops, but the area also has a large population that will suffer casualties if the attack proceeds.

"Moscow's declaration has sharply raised US commanders' concerns that American forces would be at risk if a Russian attack goes forward, CNN learned. And it has sparked US warnings to Moscow not to challenge the US military presence." The concerns center on a US-led anti-ISIS coalition base at At Tanf. US troops help monitor a 55-kilometer (34-mile) exclusion zone around At Tanf. Given its location near the borders of Syria, Jordan and Iraq, the At Tanf garrison is seen as a key strategic location as the US, Iran and Russia compete for influence in the region. There is concern the Russians could use aircraft or their naval warships in the eastern Mediterranean to launch a missile attack against what they say are militants, sparking a confrontation that could inadvertently draw in US forces if Russian targeting is not precise."

Meanwhile, in Tehran, the presidents of Iran and Russia met on Friday and agreed to a military offensive to retake the last rebel-held area in the Northwestern part of Syria. The trilateral summit in Tehran between Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had been viewed as a chance for a diplomatic solution before unleashing a full-scale assault on Syria's northwestern Idlib province. The summit did not include embattled President Bashar Assad, even though he has the most to gain from the coming "final battle" of the war. For Russia and Iran, both allies of the Syrian government, retaking Idlib is crucial to complete what they see as a military victory in Syria's civil war after Syrian troops recaptured nearly all other major towns and cities, largely defeating the rebellion against Assad.

As with other wars, who gets the pieces after the fighting is over matters. It appears that Assad will stay in power, with Russia and Iran keeping a military presence in Syria. Turkey wants no more refugees but may see thousands more coming across the

border. The US has stated it wants out of the conflict so will likely leave in the coming months. That is, of course, barring further escalations such as the possible one at Al Tanf.

As true Christians around the world prepare to keep the God ordained Feast of Tabernacles this year, the world at large still does not know the way of Peace. Speaking of our time the prophet Isaiah stated, "The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; They have made themselves crooked paths; Whoever takes that way shall not know peace. " (Isaiah 58:9)

Thankfully our Creator has a time of peace and prosperity planned for everyone, the time of the Millennial rule of Jesus Christ on this earth. That time is commemorated and looked forward to by keeping the Feast of Tabernacles every Fall. It is a time for everyone to reflect on one of God's promises to us through Jeremiah, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11)

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