

Alliances Have No Longevity in the Middle East.  
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Not only are borders shifting wildly in today's Middle East reshuffle, but alliances are too. One needs a scorecard to determine who are friends today and enemies tomorrow. This is not a new problem in the Middle East; it is a historic fact of life.

The greatest accomplishment of the Prophet Mohammad was to unify what had been anarchic tribes in the Arab Peninsula. The process of unification was brutal, but there was no other way to do it. Truces were only temporary and surrender had to be total. However, immediately after the death of Mohammad, the great gulf opened again. The Prophet left no will, so it was up to his close followers to determine succession.

The majority of these men, one generation removed from nomadism, followed their usual custom: arrive at consensus and pick the leader they thought most capable. But among these leaders, most related one way or another to the Prophet, was Mohammad's favorite, his cousin and son-in-law, Ali. Ali's faction (Shiite) thought that succession should be through the closest bloodline of Mohammad. They lost in the first round, and it took several more consensus elections until Ali was chosen.

Two years into his reign as Caliph, he was assassinated. (Few Caliphs died as old men in their beds.) His sons contested the next majority choice and they challenged the next Caliph in a battle on the plains of Mesopotamia (today's Iraq) and were almost entirely wiped out. Those followers who did survive never got over losing this battle and they have not gotten over it yet.

The winning (and largest) group in Islam is Sunni and the minority (today 15 percent) is Shiite (party of Ali). The Shiites have fragmented further, including the Sufis (mystics), the majority of whom live in Bangladesh with some in Pakistan and Turkey.

Today, Sunnis and Shiites who live together peaceably only under a dictator, are at each other's throats again. To complicate matters further, Iranians are the largest Shiite majority country, but Iraq, which was once a majority Sunni country, has over time had a population explosion of Shiites. Although it looks as if Iran can totally control Iraq's new Shiite identity, don't count on it. Iraqi Shiites are Arabs and Iranian Shiites are Persians; no love lost.

The Sunni world is also fragmenting once more, not only into tribal affiliations, but also into differing versions of Islam. The crazy Islamist cult, ISIS (or ISIL, which has delusions of creating a new Caliphate) is nominally Sunni. In Iraq, it is to the temporary advantage of Sunnis to join with ISIS, but that will not last for long. The secular and mainstream Sunnis do not want to be under the rule of Muslim fanatics such as ISIS or ISIL.

The Saudis are in a particularly awkward position. Their version of Islam is as severe as that of the Islamists, but the Islamists are not interested in Saudi theology as much as they detest Saudi practices (puritanical Islam corrupted by unlimited money). The Islamists (Al Qaida, et al) and the Saudis detest each other.

Yemen is faced by Islamist attacks, tribal militancy, and a water emergency so severe that the capital might have to move. Their biggest problem is population explosion, a problem that will be taken care of by the ensuing anarchy, lack of water, and starvation.

Iran and the Saudis detest each other and are in sharp competition for regional influence. Both countries are tottering: the Saudis politically and Iran demographically (low birthrate and dwindling water). But they both hate Al Qaeda. The Saudis will even privately cooperate with Israel in fear of Iran and terror cults.

Meanwhile, Israel watches all the chaos around them and finds that their best option is to be vigilant but hope that these factions all wipe each other out.

Christians in the region need to get out before they are completely exterminated. Sorry, you Presbyterians wanting to boycott Israel. You suffer from warped values. Visit the Middle East and see what happens when you say you are Christian, except in Israel.

678 words

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