

## Sunnis Raise the Level of Conflict

The Sunnis have just raised the level of conflict in the Sunni-Shiite war.

*BEIRUT, (Reuters) - Suicide car bombers struck Damascus on Friday, officials said, killing 40 people, gutting buildings and sending human limbs flying in the bloodiest violence seen in Syria's capital since a revolt against President Bashar al-Assad began nine months ago.*

...

*But Friday's blasts in central Damascus signaled a dramatic escalation in violence which Syrian authorities blame on armed groups they say have killed 2,000 soldiers and security force members this year. The United Nations says Assad's crackdown has killed 5,000 people.*

*"It's a new phase. We're getting militarized here," said Joshua Landis, a Syria expert at the University of Oklahoma who felt Friday's bombs were a "small premonition" of what may come in a country that some analysts see slipping towards civil war.*

*"This is when the Syrian opposition is beginning to realize they are on their own," he added, referring to Western reluctance to intervene militarily in Syria. "We're getting into a cycle of revenge. An eye for an eye." (<http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=27808>)*

Please read the entire article for more important information.

**ANALYSIS.** This suicide bomber attack follows on the heels of yesterday's coordinated bombing attacks in Baghdad. While the reasons for the attacks appear different, I do not believe that they are. Both cases revolve around the current conflict for control of Islam.

In Iraq, al-Maliki's apparent persecution of the Sunni vice president led to a massive reminder that the Sunnis should not be taken lightly nor pushed into a secondary position in national affairs. Even though there have not been bombing attacks of this size for a long while, with the United States forces gone and unable to impose a buffer between Sunni and Shia, the conflict has renewed itself.

Syria is a different matter entirely. Even during the worst days of the 1980 uprising against Hafez Assad there were no suicide bombings conducted by the Syrian Sunni that I remember. So far the protest movement has been reported to be reasonably non-violent. The bombing attacks in Damascus are a major escalation of the revolution against Bashar Assad. The other difference between 1980 and now is that the Syrian revolutionaries are armed and funded by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states principally Saudi Arabia.

Syria has become something it wasn't in 1980. It is the current focal point of the Sunni-Shiite conflict. Saudi Arabia cannot afford to have its northern border open to attack from either Syria or Iraq. Therefore it must replace the Shiite lead governments of Syria and Iraq with Sunni lead governments. Or it must insure that the current governments are kept busy fighting insurgencies and not sending Shiite "revolutionaries" into the GCC states. Saudi Arabia has already reacted strongly to Shiite uprisings in Bahrain and in its eastern provinces.

The use of suicide bombing campaigns against the Shiite states of Syria and Iraq is a major escalation. It bodes no good for the coming year.