

"The Impossible Peace - 70 Years after The World War 2 in the Middle East"

Prologue

0-1(1) Summit at Great Bitter Lake of Suez Canal



On February 14, 1945 when the allies' victory in World War II became reliable, President Franklin D. Roosevelt met with Saudi Arabia's King Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Rahman Al-Saud (also known as Ibn Saud) on the US cruiser Quincy at Great Bitter lake located in the northern part of the Suez Canal..

Just before the meeting, President Roosevelt held a three-way talks with British Prime Minister Churchill and Secretary General of the Soviet Socialist Republic Federation (Soviet Union) Stalin at Yalta on the

Crimean Peninsula from Feb 4 till 11, 1945. They discussed about world order after the Second World War and unconditional surrender of Japan (Yalta talks)

President Roosevelt was scheduled to return home immediately via Malta after the Yalta talks ended. However, Roosevelt on board the battleship Quincy did not head to the United States. Instead, he took the risk of attack by the German submarine U-boat in the Mediterranean, and made Quincy headed to the Suez Canal to talk with the King of Saudi Arabia. He spared his precious time for having talked with the King before returning home. It clearly showed that he himself and the United States made a point of Saudi Arabia as a important ally in the postwar Arab world.

One of the reasons the United States making a point of Saudi Arabia was in oil resources that sleep under the soil of that country. At the end of the World War I, there was a famous telegram addressed to then US president Wilson in which French Prime Minister Clemenceau who was in German fight. Clemenceau wrote "One drop of oil is one drop of blood". Value of oil in World War II was clear not only Roosevelt but also to everyone's eyes. It was increasingly demonstrated and indispensable for economic recovery after the war.

Between the two world wars in 1930s , several large oil fields were discovered in Iraq and Kuwait. It proved that the Persian Gulf is a big oil field area. The world's largest Saudi Arabian Ghawar oil field was discovered by the US oil company in 1940. No oil field beyond the reserves of the Ghawar oil field was found 70 years later, and this record will not be broken in future. Development of a full-fledged oil field remained frozen as the First World War broke out one year earlier than the discovery of Ghawar. The oil consumption during World War II has reached hundreds of times at the time of World War I.

The President was anxious that the US would consume at a pace more than newly discovered and the supply of oil would be tapered. The United States, as soon as the war ended, should start developing the oil fields of Saudi Arabia, and wanted to secure oil steadily and at the same time to capture the hegemony of postwar world energy.

Roosevelt, also, had a diplomatic problem wanting to support Abdul Aziz. It is to avoid the Jews and Arabs conflict in Palestine. By the British Balfour Declaration and the Hussein-McMahon agreement which promised to both Jewish and Arabs during the First World War has also strengthened the independence movement around the Palestinian land. Confrontation between the two sides was in deep. US's consistent policy from previous presidency of Roosevelt was to support the immigration and settlement of Jews. Roosevelt sent a letter to Abdul Aziz from time to time before their meeting. He asked the advice of the king about how to reduce and how the collision of Jews and Arabs over the immigration and land. King Abdul Aziz was also consistent to stop Jewish immigration to Palestine. That was the answer of Abdul Aziz king.

Although they each other faced difficult problems in the future, their talks were very friendly. Abdul Aziz was a full-bodied creature by repeated battle in the Arabian Peninsula. A big man with 1 meter 90 cm and dragging his feet overwhelmed the people and had a charismatic leadership. In addition, he was a honest man and has sent a religious life. Roosevelt seems to have felt personal familiarity to Abdul Aziz without prejudice of race and religion.

Later, Roosevelt explained this meeting as follows;

"Through discussions with the King of Saudi Arabia, I could get more content from a single meeting than many information by the State Department so far "

President Roosevelt, shortly after returning home, died at the age of 63 as incumbent president by heart attack on April 12. It was before allied nation's victory. The meeting between Roosevelt and Abdul Aziz, so called "West meets East", was the first historical significance after the Second World War.

(To be continued ----)

By Areha Kazuya

E-mail: areha_kazuya@jcom.home.ne.jp