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December, 2021

Remarkable UAE diplomatic activities

UAE activates its diplomacy



It is remarkable that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) activates its diplomacy in recent days. It is led by Prince Muhammad Bin Zayed al-Nahyan (abbreviated as MBZ) of Abu Dhabi. In the UAE, Abu Dhabi monopolizes the most of federal matters such as diplomacy, military and financial issues except economic ones which is carried out by Dubai. MBZ is the half-brother of Khalifa Bin Zayed who is the Amir of Abu Dhabi and the president of the UAE. But MBZ is regarded as a de facto UAE leader because his brother is not good in health.

Three Reasons for Active Diplomacy

There are three reasons that make the UAE active in diplomacy. The first one is that the United States withdrew from the Middle East (including Afghanistan) and shifted to "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP)". The United States lost interest about the Middle East. As the result, the Middle East became unstable. Middle East countries acknowledged that their own diplomacy became more important.

The second reason is that the UAE has restored diplomatic relations with Israel. The Arab countries and Israel had been hostile to each other. But a new WIN-WIN relationship was created in the Middle East in terms of economy. Dubai of UAE took the remarkable advantage.

The third reason is that a crack in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council), which consists of six Gulf monarchy nations including the UAE, is growing swiftly in recent years. The dispute over the Muslim Brotherhood between Qatar and three fellow countries, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain, was settled last year. But this has weakened the prestigious status of Saudi Arabia¹. In addition, the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi has damaged the reputation of the Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (MBS) of Saudi Arabia. UAE feels free from Saudi Arabia to carry out its own diplomacy.

Active Diplomacy by MBZ and Ministers

There were many examples of active diplomacy by MBZ, Foreign Ministers and other dignitaries in recent months. On October 9, the UAE Minister of Economy agreed to economic cooperation with Syria². On November 9, Foreign Minister met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus³. UAE had severed diplomatic ties with Syria in 2012, and reopened the embassy in 2018 following the return of Syria to member of the Arab League. On 19 November, MBZ met US

Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin and discussed about regional affairs⁴. He also had telephone calls with the Presidents of Egypt and Iraq respectively on 25 November⁵. Furthermore, on Nov 22, Presidential Advisor and ex-Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash met Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister in Dubai⁶.

These facts tell that UAE is seeking its own diplomacy in the wake of the US withdrawal from the Middle East. MBZ's visit to Turkey was the highlight. He visited Turkey on November 24 and met President Erdogan⁷. So far, the relation between UAE and Turkey was not cooperative. In the 2016 Turkish coup attempt, Turkey accused the UAE of providing financial support to rebels. In addition, Turkey sent its troops to Qatar when Qatar severed the diplomatic ties with UAE. In the Libyan civil war, Turkey supported the Libyan orthodox government, while UAE supported the Haftar militia of rebels and bombed capital Tripoli. However, when MBZ visited Turkey, he announced to set up a \$ 10 billion investment fund⁸ to support Turkish economy, which was in serious condition due to the recession caused by the corona disaster, high inflation and collapse of currency. UAE's support was a welcome rain during the dry weather. President Erdogan appreciated UAE very much, and he offered his visit to UAE in February next year⁹.

Improvement of relations between the UAE and Israel is also providing the UAE with a new business opportunity. The UAE concluded diplomatic ties with Israel in 2019 mediated by ex-US President Donald Trump. An agreement named Abraham Accord after a common ancestor of Judaism and Islam, was signed between two countries. Israel opened its embassy in Abu Dhabi which was the first one in the Gulf countries. Abu Dhabi national flight landed on in Tel Aviv. A trilateral economic cooperation project has been established between UAE, Israel and Jordan. The project produces solar power in Jordan with UAE's financial assistance and export the electricity to Israel. Israel supplies Jordan with natural gas in return¹⁰.

The third reason of UAE's active diplomacy is that the control by Saudi Arabia against other GCC member countries became weaker. In the past, five GCC countries including the UAE and Qatar obeyed to Saudi Arabia passively due to the strong leadership of Saudi Arabia backed by the United States. Saudi Arabia concludes Jewish Israel, Shiite Iran and Sunni Muslim Brotherhood as Islamic extremists. Saudi Arabia forces other GCC countries as these powers are the threat to the Gulf monarchies. However, Qatar has increased its international presence by partnering with Turkey to repel Saudi pressure. Qatar and Turkey are to act as a mediator between the Taliban administration of Afghanistan and Western countries.

The UAE's restoration of diplomatic relations with Israel ahead of Saudi Arabia also weakens GCC cohesion. In Saudi Arabia, King Salman and Crown Prince Muhammad (MBS) have different views on the diplomatic policy toward Israel. The assassination of journalist Khashoggi has lost the international trust of MBS. These phenomena produced the crack among GCC members. UAE needs not to take Saudi Arabia into consideration.

The UAE, which took advantage in diplomatic activities, is trying to raise its prestige not only in the Middle East but also in the world. In addition to the Expo currently being held in Dubai, UAE was recently elected as the top of Interpol (International Criminal Police Organization)¹¹. UAE also proposed as the host country of United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in 2023 following COP27 to be held in Cairo next year¹².

It is extremely interesting to see what kind of diplomatic activities the UAE will adopt in the future.

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¹ 'Saudi Diplomacy Fallen to the Ground Part1: Unconditionally Reconciled GCC Summit'
<http://ocininitiative.maeda1.jp/202101SaudiDiplomacy1English.pdf>

² UAE and Syria agree to 'enhance economic cooperation'

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1945311/middle-east>

2021/10/10 Arab News

³ UAE foreign minister meets with Bashar Assad in Damascus

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1964731/middle-east>

2021/11/9 Arab News

⁴ Abu Dhabi crown prince and US defense secretary discuss strategic bilateral relations

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1972511/middle-east>

2021/11/21 Arab News

⁵ Abu Dhabi crown prince holds separate talks with Egypt, Iraq leaders

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1975641/middle-east>

2021/11/26 Arab News

⁶ UAE and Iran to develop ties in 'new chapter in relations'

https://www.arabnews.jp/en/middle-east/article_60222/

2021/11/24 Arab News

⁷ Erdoğan hosts MBZ as Turkey, UAE seek to repair bilateral ties

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/erdogan-hosts-mbz-as-turkey-uae-seek-to-repair-bilateral-ties>

2021/11/24 Daily Sabah

⁸ UAE announces \$10 billion fund for investments in Turkey

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1974661/business-economy>

2021/11/24 Arab News

⁹ Turkey's Erdogan says he will visit UAE in February

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1977636/middle-east>

2021/11/29 Arab News

¹⁰ Jordan, Israel, UAE ink energy-for-water agreement

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1973331/middle-east>

2021/11/23 Arab News

¹¹ UPDATED: Interpol elects United Arab Emirates official as president

<https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/443272/World/Region/UPDATED-Interpol-elects-United-Arab-Emirates-offic.aspx>

2021/11/25 Ahram Online

¹² Egypt officially selected to host UN COP27

<https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/439514.aspx>

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