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"The Peace on The Horizon - 70 Years after The World War 2 in the Middle East"(34)

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Chapter 4: War and Peace in The Middle East

4-6(34) Islamic revolution in Iran

Until the end of the 1970s Iran was the most stable country in the Middle East. In 1921 Reza Shah of Cossack troops established Pahlavi dynasty by a coup d'etat, and changed the country name of Persia to Iran. In the World War II, he approached the Nazis of Germany. Iran, therefore, was surrendered by the Allied Forces. His son Muhammad Reza Pahlavi inherited the position of the Shah. Then the Communist Party gained power. In 1951 Mosaddegh became Prime Minister and nationalized the oil industry.

The United States, which thought Iran's communism and nationalization of oil industry as crisis, overthrew the Mosaddegh regime through the secret operation by the Central Intelligence Agency(CIA). Muhammad Reza Pahlavi gained full authority again. Since then the honeymoon relationship between the United States and Iran had started. The United States generously gave the state-of-the-art weapons to Iran. In return Iran poured the wealth of oil to the United States. The US entrusted Iran to stabilize around the Persian Gulf and to support indirectly the unstable situation of Israel. Iran became called "Police officers of Persian Gulf". Muhammad made reign of terror with the cooperation of the CIA of the United States and Mossad of Israeli intelligence agency. The network of the secret police, so-called SAVAK, covered all over the country. Agricultural land reform, privatization of state enterprises and right of women's vote were introduced in order to curry the United States' favor. It was called White Revolution.

The most influenced people by the White Revolution was merchants of the bazaar (market) in the city and the religious power of the Islamic clergy. Prophet Muhammad was a leader of the caravan, so in Islamic society the chemistry between merchant and religious classes was in good relation. In addition, the power of the merchant in the Middle East could not be neglected. Merchants and clergies cooperated each other and resisted the Shah regime. Shah was merciless for the resistance movement, and imprisoned them or exiled them abroad. Ayatollah Khomeini, a top religious leader, was expelled abroad. He directed the resistance movement from Paris.



In 1978, a slander article against Ayatollah Khomeini triggered a riot in the sacred City Qom. They protested the government suppressing them, and demonstrators shouted the establishment of Islamic state. The riot spread throughout Iran like the wildfire. In January 1979, Shah finally retired and exiled abroad. In exchange Ayatollah Khomeini returned home from Paris. In 1979, the Islamic Revolution achieved at last.

In April of the same year, the Islamic Republic of Iran was declared by a referendum. Ayatollah Khomeini advocated “velayat-e faqih”. Velayat-e faqih meant Guardianship of Islamic Jurist. It was the basic theory of the national sovereignty. Religious state was established in Islamic modern society for the first time. Velayat-e faqih is the legal theory unique to the Twelver Shiism occupying the majority of Muslims in Iran. Twelver Shiism preaches as follows; Imam, religious leader, took over the leadership after Muhammad's death. But the Imam of twelfth successor suddenly hid out (Hidden Imam). Thereafter the Islamic religious leader ruled the world on behalf of Imam until he appears as Mahdi. Their theory justifies the control by religious clerics. Iran became a religious state which was very rare in the modern world.

At the same time, a communist regime was born in Afghanistan next to the east of Iran, and the war started. The War in Afghanistan had two aspects; ideology and religion. That was the reason why the United States of America and the Arab Islamic countries, which historically conflicted each other, opposed the USSR in one mind. In other words, the United States which believed liberalism and capitalism as the best ideology thought that the War in Afghanistan was the final ideological war against USSR. While the Arab-Islamic countries thought that the war was religious one to stop the invasion of atheism.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran had changed the social structure from the ideology of liberalism and capitalism by Shah to religious beliefs of Ayatollah Khomeini. Both the USSR and the United States were perplexed by the change in the social structure of Iran. The impact of the United States, which lost the only one friend in the Middle East, was much big compared with USSR. The United States has protected Shah's exile under humanitarian consideration. This, however, ignited the anti-American sentiments of Iranian students. They occupied the US embassy in Tehran. As the occupation lasted for a year, the strong anti-Iran sentiment was born in the United States. There is no indication to end the mutual antipathy until now. It was the beginning of the unfortunate history between Iran and the United States.

(To be continued ----)