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"The Peace on The Horizon - 70 Years after The World War 2 in the Middle East"(35)

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Chapter 4: War and Peace in The Middle East

4-7(35) Iran-Iraq War: Isolated Iran vs Iraq supported by Arab & US



The Islamic warriors in Afghanistan (Mujahideen) have advantageously fought Afghan War which was not only the battle between the communist central government backed by the USSR and Muslim guerillas but also the battle between atheism and monotheism. In Iran, Islamic coalition forces between clerics and bazaar merchants succeeded in the Islamic Revolution beating the Shah who advocated the Western style "White Revolution". The Islamic revival movement began in Afghanistan and spread to the neighboring Iran.

Ayatollah Khomeini, the top religious leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, has directed Islamic revival movement further to the Arab countries. He urged Muslims in the Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain on the other side of the Persian Gulf to overthrow the monarchic institution. Ayatollah Khomeini criticized that Saud family of Saudi Arabia has made Islamic holy cities Makkah and Madinah its own belongings, and they further monopolized the oil wealth. Khomeini condemned Saud Family as enemy of Allah. He preached that Muslims had to overthrow the monarch.

In addition, Ayatollah Khomeini further asked Muslims in Iraq to rebel against a secular dictator who forgot the teachings of Islam and disobeying Allah. There were many Shiite residents on the Persian Gulf coast and the southern part of Iraq. In Bahrain the Shiite Muslim were majority of the population. In Iraq which was controlled by Sunnis president, there were many Shiites in the southern part of the country too. Khomeini called these Shiite residents to overthrow the regime. And he aimed to overthrow even Israel. He called on Islamic countries "Kick down Israel to the Mediterranean!".

The dictator of Iraqi and monarchs of Gulf countries were frightened by roaring Khomeini. In November 1979 when the Iranian Revolution took place, a man who arrogated himself as Mahdi

occupied the Kaaba Mosque of Makkah in Saudi Arabia with his supporters. Every Sunni rulers strengthened the control of Shiite Muslims. The battle between the Shiite and the Sunni had begun again since the days of the cradle of the Islam. In Christianity, conflict between sects having different doctrine often took place, and sometime resulted in warfare. In Islamic society there was an unwritten rule that was generous to the differences of sects and did not interfere with each other. However, the Iranian Revolution brought about a new confrontation between Sunni and Shiite.

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein thought this conflict as an opportunity to reinforce his power. He declared war on Iran. It was common for dictators to declare war against neighboring country to divert the people's eyes from domestic problems. President Hussein just tried that effect. But he expected another effect. He was sure that as soon as he declared the war against Iran, there might be many countries which would support his country. He made up the Iran-Iraq War not only as the battle between the Persians and Arabs but also the battle between Shiite and Sunni.

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which had a good number of Shiite in the country, were weak and could not stand on the stage of the war against the powerful Iran. Hussein urged that they should share war costs with Iraq which fight on behalf of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia appreciated Iraq. As rich countries, they were satisfied if the money could settle their annoyance. They proceeded to bear the war cost. Hussein also did not miss the fact that anti-Iran feelings were rising in the United States owing to overthrow of Shah's regime and occupation of the US embassy in Tehran. Of course, it was unrealistic that the United States would support the dictatorship of Iraq. But it was almost certain that the United States would become the friend of Iraq if Iraq opened the fire to Iran. And when the war began, even the USSR supported the Iraq in addition to the United States.

The Iran-Iraq War began in September 1980 from a surprise attack by Iraq. Iraqi army with superior in modern armament went into Iranian territory in the first stage of battle. But Iranian resistance was intense. The Iranian volunteer soldiers who had just experienced the Islamic Revolution had high fighting spirit. They fought bravely without fear of death. It was Iraqi soldiers who feared. Iranian soldiers appeared one after another in the battlefield like swarms. The population of 80 million in Iran meant there was no shortage to replenish the volunteer soldiers. Iraqi soldiers lost fighting spirit. The war fell into a stalemate in May of the next year. Iran-Iraq War which was Persian versus Arab or Shiite versus Sunni had become a war of attrition.

(To be continued ----)