

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

[\(Japanese Version\)](#)

[\(Arabic Version\)](#)

### Chapter 4: War and Peace in The Middle East

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



In Afghanistan, Islamic warriors (Mujahideen) have advantageously fought Afghan War. Afghan War was not only the battle between the communist central government backed by the USSR and rural tribal rebels but also the battle between atheism and monotheism. The Islamic renaissance movement began in Afghanistan and then penetrated into the neighboring Iran. In Iran, Islamic coalition forces consisting of clerics and bazaar merchants defeated Reza Shah who advocated the Western style "White Revolution". They achieved the Islamic Revolution.

Ayatollah Khomeini, a top religious leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, had the intention to spread Islamic renaissance movement to the Arab countries. He preached Muslims in the Arab countries in the other side of the Persian Gulf, e.g. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. He called them to overthrow the monarchies. Ayatollah Khomeini criticized that Saud family of Saudi Arabia had been occupying Islamic holy cities Makkah and Madinah and monopolized the oil wealth. Ayatollah Khomeini condemned Saud Family as enemy of Allah. He preached that Muslims had to overthrow the monarch. Ayatollah Khomeini also allured Muslims in Iraq to resist the secular dictator who forgot the faith of Islam and neglect Allah.

There were many Shiite residents along the Persian Gulf coast. In Bahrain the Shiite Muslim were majority of the population. Also there were many Shiites in the southern part of Iraq where Sunni President governed the country. 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!".

In November 1979 when the Iranian Revolution took place, a young man who arrogated himself as Mahdi occupied the Kaaba Mosque of Makkah in Saudi Arabia. The dictator of Iraq and monarchs of Gulf countries were frightened by roaring Khomeini. 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 7<sup>th</sup> century. Although Christianity often had conflict between sects having different doctrine and sometime resulted in warfare, Islamic society used to be generous to the different sects.

They did not interfere each other. However, the Iranian Revolution brought about a new confrontation between Sunni and Shiite sects.

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein thought this conflict as an opportunity to maximize 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 had the same attitude. He expected another effect, too. He was sure that as soon as he declared the war against Iran, Gulf countries might follow to Iraq. He persuaded Gulf countries that the Iran-Iraq War was the battle between the Persians and Arabs and the battle between Shiite and Sunni. Furthermore, he insisted to Western countries that the Iran-Iraq War was the battle between religious politics and secular democracy.

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia had been annoyed with Shiite residents in their countries. But they were too weak to fight with powerful Iran. Hussein urged rulers of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to burden war costs and Iraq would fight on behalf of them in return. Both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia appreciated Iraq. Gulf rich countries were satisfied if the money could settle their annoyance. They proceeded to bear the war cost. Hussein also did not overlook the fact that anti-Iran feelings were accumulating in the United States after the overthrow of Shah's regime and the 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 ally of Iraq if Iraq opened the fire to Iran. When the war began, even the USSR supported the Iraq in addition to the United States.

The Iran-Iraq War took place in September 1980 with a surprise attack by Iraq. At the first stage of battle, Iraqi army invaded Iranian territory with superior modern armament. But the resistance of Iran was intense. The Iranian volunteer soldiers who had just won 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 locust. Iran had the big population of 80 million. There was no shortage to replenish the volunteer soldiers. Iraqi soldiers lost fighting spirit. The war fell into a stalemate in May 1981. Iran-Iraq War which was Persian versus Arab or Shiite versus Sunni had become a war of attrition.

(To be continued ----)

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