

池内恵

SATOSHI IKEUCHI

HOW DID WE END UP HERE?

UNDERSTANDING A JAPANESE'S PERSPECTIVE OF
THE LAST 3 YEARS OF WORLD POLITICS



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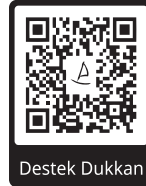
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Preface

The 105 columns in this volume are chronicles of the transformation of the Middle East order from a Japanese point of view in a peculiar moment of history when the humankind has been experiencing a great transformation and turning points.

For more than two years from early 2019 to 2021, I had opportunity to conduct weekly conversations with the Middle East readers by contributing to one of the Arabic newspapers in Dubai, called *Alroeya* (The View). For the serial contributions to the Arabic media, I was accustomed to preparing English texts first, which were then rendered into Arabic with often omitting and revising. A parallel English and Arabic versions were left to me, the latter paying more attention to sensitivities of each countries and rulers of the region. The English version compiled in this book were more freely written.

The first half this book was written while frequently traveling back and forth between Japan and Middle Eastern cities, Ankara, Beirut, Cairo, Dubai, Doha, and Istanbul. Tel Aviv and Jerusalem were also part of destinations but they were never mentioned in the texts, in accordance with the sensitivities and political circumstances of those days.

Then, the second half was written while being trapped in the room in my hometown under the COVID-19 travel restrictions.

When I started writing these columns, the world order was beginning to be transformed, in a slow motion. It was a transition of the yesterday's order in which the Middle East was the

center of the international politics and security, to the tomorrow world in which the East Asia centered on China is the focal point of the international politics and Levant and the Mediterranean Sea regions including the Europe are in the twilight at the “Far West” of the new world order.

These columns were written with the aim of witnessing the process of this historical transition in which the center of gravity of geopolitics gradually moved eastward and into Asia at a steady but invisible speed.

Unexpectedly, this change accelerated sharply with the arrival of COVID-19.

China became the ominous center of the COVID-19 plague which knocked the world into the dark. The human community was blacked out and people’s lives have been locked down.

In the dark, the world’s pivot to Asia was further accelerated.

What will happen to the world when all the COVID-19 calamities are over? This chronicle is an effort to light the path in an era of darkness.

In publishing this book, I would like to express my gratitude to the two people I have been indebted to in my research and exploration of the Middle Eastern politics and security.

First of all, my gratitude goes to the sharp energetic and charming Egyptian officer, Major General Dr. Sayed Ghoneim who is chairman of the Institute for Global Security & Defense

Affairs (IGSDA) in Abu Dhabi and Cairo. Sayed's friendship and leadership gave me rare occasion of a Japanese author addressing directly to the audience in the Arab world and the wider Middle East.

Last but not least, I'd like to thank Ercan Çitliođlu of the Center of Strategic Research of the Bařkent University in Ankara, a veteran security expert who repeatedly invited me to the Istanbul Security Conference which is jointly organized with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Turkey. The annual conferences in Istanbul gave me invaluable opportunities to discuss issues of international security and geopolitics with leading experts and intellectuals of the Middle East. Ercan's support also led me to the bright and cozy office of Destek Yayınları in řiřli-İstanbul to which I'd love to revisit as soon as the pandemic is gone.

Satoshi Ikeuchi
Tokyo and Kyoto, Japan
March 2021

Part I

Middle East's Pivot to Asia

February 22, 2019

Middle East's Pivot to Asia

The Middle East is now in a period of great transformation. The pivot of the Middle East from under the Trans-Atlantic sphere of power turning toward the Indo-Pacific world of prosperity is the most important phase of this transition.

The Middle East has for so long been part of the Trans-Atlantic world in the Modern age. As the infamous Sykes-Picot agreement shows us, Britain and France, two Powers on the eastern shore of the Atlantic dictated the boundaries of modern nation states in the Middle East. After the World War II, the United States, a new superpower at the western shore of the Atlantic, joined this Trans-Atlantic co-dominance of the Middle East.

Asia was not within the scope of the people in the Middle Eastern countries and those who are in charge policy on the Middle East policy in Washington DC. For Americans who are involved in the Middle East affairs, the East Asia and particularly the Far East Asia looked a marginal subject outside the concern of mainstream Trans-Atlantic world politics.

That situation is about to change.

The Middle Eastern countries finally began to look east. Of course, the wealth and opportunity that China's economic development brought to fore is the primary cause of the change. However, increasingly a concern for excessive dependence on China is also felt.