

# MEIJI INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL AFFAIRS

## *MIGA Column “Global Diagnosis”*

April 19, 2016

**Masayuki Yamauchi**

Professor, Meiji Institute for Global Affairs, Meiji University

Short Curriculum Vitae) Masayuki Yamauchi

University of Tokyo Professor emeritus (Doctor of Philosophy, University of Tokyo),  
Fuji Television specially appointed advisor, Mitsubishi Corp. advisor

Held positions such as Cairo University Visiting Assistant Professor, Turkish Historical Society researcher, and Harvard University visiting researcher. His specialization is the history of international relations and research on Islamic regions. In 2006, he received the Medal of Honor with Purple Ribbon. In the fall of 2013, he published “*A study on the history of Middle Eastern international relations – The Turkish War of Independence and Soviet Russia 1918-1923*” (Iwanami Shoten).

Has served to date as a committee member on the “Education Rebuilding Council” established by the Prime Minister’s Official Residence, and the “Commission on Japan’s Goals in the 21st Century” (abbreviated designation), and as chairperson of the “National Security Council.” In March 2015, he was inducted into the “Yokozuna Deliberation Council” of the Japan Sumo Association.

### **The Middle Eastern and European combined crises as history**

#### **In place of a postscript to the paperback edition**

Not a day goes by without hearing news of a terrorist bombing or plot. Many of these terrorists are descendants of families who migrated to Europe from the Middle East including the Arab states, or individuals who arrived in Europe mixed in among Syrian refugees or disguised as refugees. The simultaneous terrorist attacks which took place at Brussels Airport and within the city of Brussels on March 22, 2016 reminded us once again of the strength of the terrorist networks which have laid down roots in Europe,

and the influence of the Sunni extremist organization “Islamic State” (IS) centering in Syria.

This kind of indiscriminate terrorism represents nothing less than a chain linking the major November 2015 simultaneous terror attack in Paris which claimed 130 lives, with the attack on the Charlie Hebdo headquarters in the same city in January 2015, of which 17 people died. The present incidents have brought home that the “battlefield” is not limited to the stronghold of IS within the borders of Syria and Iraq, but is considered to extend to faraway Paris and Brussels. What is of importance is not a dimensional problem of whether or not the perpetrators of the terrorism were ordered and directed from the Middle East. With IS invariably regarding all events as means to justify the maintenance and expansion of its organization and to make a display, the political effect of the expansion of the fear and hatred of the citizens of the US and Europe for IS must be considered.

The crisis currently underway differs from former wars between countries. Rather, it is part of an asymmetrical post-modern or hybrid-type “war” with nation states on the part of non-state actor organizations typified by IS. If this point is overlooked and events dealt with simply as terror attacks, this will lead to handling them only from a criminal offense-related perspective of whether or not to deprive citizens of their freedom of speech and movement. This will not lead to a solution of the proliferation of terrorism crisis currently underway. Rather, the issue in terms of individual survival and the existence of society, is to confront a historically new situation while holding an outlook of how to isolate and protect citizens from a post-modern “warfare” which uses terrorism as an effective tactic.

It is harmful for the media and European public opinion to trivialize intra-European terrorism as a series of incidents. The Charlie Hebdo terror attack, the large scale act of terrorism in Paris, and the simultaneous terror attacks in Brussels are critical omens that the multiple crises underway in the Middle East, centering on Syria, are developing into “Middle Eastern and European combined crises” through the burgeoning influx of refugees into Europe and the proliferation of terror. I had the opportunity to deal with this prospect in detail in “From the complex Middle East crisis to a third world war,” (PHP SHINSHO) and would be delighted for you to refer to it.

Incidentally, the imperialistic segmentation of the Middle Eastern region by England, France, Russia and so on from the 19th to 20th centuries, and the American Gulf War and Iraq War from the 20th through to the 21st centuries are considered unpleasant history by almost the entire population of the Middle East. Perhaps it is for these reasons that there was an initial inclination to identify with IS among one portion of public opinion in Islamic society. Particularly in the cases of Turkey and Saudi Arabia, where there was also a rivalry with the Assad regime and Shia Iran, there was a period of considerable closeness to IS. However, the great majority of people in Islamic society have come to understand the utter inhumanity and brutality of IS; that its true nature is terror, and that it is no longer a problem relating to religious justice. IS is attempting to create a rift between pious followers of Islam and believers of other religions through a terrorism which travels freely back and forth between criminality and war.

So what can be done to prevent and eradicate indiscriminate terrorism? There is a school of thought which seeks its cause in the relative poverty and social discrimination of people from the Middle East and Muslims in Europe. Nevertheless, it is certainly not the case that all young people are turning to terrorism. Words such as “If poverty and discrimination were resolved terrorism would disappear” and “The dispute can be settled through dialogue between the parties concerned” are beautiful, but lack persuasiveness. Why did individuals belonging to the ordinary middle-class transform into terrorists who do not hesitate to commit merciless acts of terrorism, even if there were women or children on the site? The mentality of such young persons can be generally explained from the perspective of nihilism. Even so, it is currently difficult to provide a definite answer in terms of a societal background which gives rise to “anger” and individual inner psychology. It may be considered that a lack of desire to make a living through labor in any profession, a complex originating in a comparative disadvantage with successful and propertied persons, a distorted juvenile desire which is forever denied in an abundant society, or emotions and impulses which are a mixture of these, may be linked to nihilism.

Terrorism is a different kind of matter from general acts which violate the law. It cannot be said that the perpetrators of the large scale terrorism in Paris and the simultaneous terror attacks in Brussels were individuals who were particularly devoted to the Islamic

faith. Rather, they included individuals who were only involved in an anti-Islamic morality group, who had only alcohol addiction and addiction to pleasure. In any case, the route by which individuals who repeatedly commit antisocial acts which violate normal legal standards transform into terrorists labelled as Islamic has not been made clear. It should be stated that the severity of the terror problem in Europe resides in this point.

What is important when capturing the essence of terrorism in Europe, as briefly touched upon previously, is the worsening of a Middle Eastern and European combined crisis in the form of the spillover and expansion of complex crises in the Middle East connected with recurrent terrorism in Europe. In particular, the failure of a peaceful solution to the war in Syria and the protraction of the war are grounds for concern which exacerbate the crisis. Among other things, the "two axes of opposition" of the rekindled historical discord between Russia and Turkey originating with the shooting down of a Russian aircraft by the Turkish military, along with conflict over sects within Islam and Gulf security between Saudi Arabia and Iran, may be said to lie behind the prolongation of conflicts.

Particularly troublesome is the interference and agenda of Russia, a major power outside the region. The collapse of the dictatorships in Iraq and Libya, the major countries in the Middle East to which Russia exported arms, meant that Syria alone remained. Syria is also an important strategic base for Russia. Tartus in Syria, where a supply base is stationed, is indispensable to the expansion of the Black Sea Fleet into the Mediterranean. Russia is also attempting to recover the Middle Eastern interests and prestige it lost after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Additionally, it has an agenda to do away with the influence Turkey has maintained in Syria since the days of the Ottoman Empire. Russia had the intention of provoking the Turkish armed forces and enticing their ground forces into Syrian territory, with a view to claiming that Turkey had become involved in a Syrian civil war when they clashed with Syrian governmental forces and minority Kurds, and striking by land, sea and air. By realizing a design to establish an autonomous Kurdish region along the Syrian border with Turkey, Russia aims to cut off contact between Turkey and the Arab world, and ultimately to bring about the collapse of the positive but already merely nominal

new Ottoman diplomacy. Moreover, Russia is not relinquishing its aim of perpetuating the stationing of military troops in Syria, even as it feigns withdrawal of the main body of troops.

On the other hand, that the situation in the Middle East including Syria has come to present so complex a crisis is not unrelated to the pressure from Russia over the problems in Syria due to the failure to act and inactivity of the US. The US has aimed for simultaneous containment of IS and the Assad regime, but appears to have eventually realized that this has been unsuccessful due to the complexity of the situation. Even so, in order to stem the crisis, the US also has an agenda to recover its voice without resort to military intervention, while seeking agreement with Russia.

President Obama went so far as to say at the end of March 2016 that the overthrow of IS is his utmost priority above all else. For US ally Saudi Arabia on the other hand, if Russia and Shia Iran were to gain the upper hand with regard to the situation in Syria, the regional balance of power would be disturbed and the position of Saudi Arabia, the leading Sunni power, would be under threat.

Saudi Arabia is engaging in brinkmanship diplomacy in order to make the US a central player in the complex Middle East crisis and pit it against Iran and Russia, Saudi Arabia. The February 2016 Saudi Arabia pronouncement that it is prepared to dispatch ground troops into Syria depending on the circumstances was intended to draw the US into the war in Syria as a check against Russia and Iran, but the US was not entrapped by this, due to the convening of the Geneva peace talks on Syria. However, the complex Middle East crisis in which each nation's interests are entangled is liable to worsen further, and by the time the paperback version is published the Middle Eastern and European combined crises may be underway in earnest. The phrase that the situation is impossible to predict is used precisely for complex phases of history such as the current one.

Changes in the countries neighboring Syria are also of concern. In Iran, the power backing moderate President Rouhani won a victory in the parliamentary election at the end of February 2016. I was visiting Tehran, Isfahan and Shiraz one month prior to that and came into contact with the high expectations of the people with regard to the lifting of sanctions due to the nuclear accord. Having said that however, Iranian domestic

affairs are not so simple as for the current Islamic political system to immediately reform and convert to a moderate line. This is because the Revolutionary Guard, which is the foundation of Iranian hard-line conservatives, is plotting against the regime in other ways while lending its support to Shia forces in Yemen and Bahrain. Iran is also directly intervening in the Syrian civil war through the Revolutionary Guard. The various Arab Sunni countries including Saudi Arabia are exercising extreme caution with regard to these actions of Iran. In Iran's political power relations, the two differing vectors of moderates and hard-liners are always at work, and this state of affairs whereby difficult problems are generated internally and externally will continue for some time to come in the 21st century.

US and Russia co-chaired peace talks between the Assad regime and its opposition intended to bring an end to the civil war in Syria were convened at the end of January 2016, but they were quickly suspended. Even should they be reconvened, IS and its rival the Al-Nusra Front will undoubtedly be excluded from the peace talks. In contrast with the Vietnam and Bosnia and Herzegovina war and civil war, powerful organizations of the warring parties (even though their defining characteristics are undeniably terrorist) are not allowed any involvement in the peace process, and from the outset the negation of the talks themselves by American and European countries including the US and Russia is making a resolution of the civil war in Syria difficult. That political bodies which are not nations with state responsibility are negatively determining peace outcomes in this way, is a major characteristic of post-modern or hybrid-type warfare.

As this article has shown, "the weapon known as history" is useful when considering these Middle Eastern political matters as a whole. And when "The weapon known as history" was first published, the existence of readers who eagerly read it was truly an honor. Those people value thinking historically, and may be united by open minded expectations of the study of history in terms of the medium-term outlook for the future. I would also like to express my appreciation to the readers in the postscript of the paperback edition. Finally, I owe a great deal with regard to how this book came about to my two esteemed friends, Mr. Kenichi Kimura and Mr. Takayuki Kamikura and would like once again to extend my thanks to them.