

Securing Peace in Afghanistan: A Primer on Japan's Role

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ABSTRACT The so-called 'War on Terror' launched by the United States following the September 11, 2001 attacks in its soil has had far-reaching implications to the pursuit of peace across many parts of the world. One of the crucial areas where the war is being fought is Afghanistan, which has been both a breeding ground of terrorism and a victim of violent terrorist attacks itself. This brief analyses the role played by Japan, a major ally of the US, in the effort to curb terrorism and ensure stability in Afghanistan. It highlights Japan's contributions in terms of economic aid and assistance.

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INTRODUCTION

Diplomatic relations between Japan and Afghanistan were formally established in 1931. At the time, there were barely 30 Japanese individuals residing in Afghanistan. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1989, Japan extended support to Afghan refugees, as well as to a United Nations (UN) resolution condemning Russia's excessive use of force during the invasion. Since 2001, Japan has been helping Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan through its government, as well as by funding international NGOs in Kabul and in other parts of the country.¹

Japan reacted with extreme concern to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It provoked memories of the Sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system by the Aum cult in 1995, which killed 12 people and injured more than 5,000. It was the most serious terror attack in Japan's history.² Following September 11, Japan's Prime Minister at the time, Junichiro Koizumi, called it "a despicable attack not only on the United States but also on humanity as a whole."³ Koizumi asked his Cabinet members to consider dispatching Japan's Self-Defence Forces (SDF) to the US for counterterrorism operations.⁴

Japan's participation in the post-9/11 war on terror has been significant. It has been trying to position itself as a "Britain of Asia" in keeping with the US' global strategy. Its contribution has gone beyond the financial support it provided the US during the Gulf War of the early 1990s.⁵ PM Koizumi realised that financial support would not be enough to secure peace in a region like Afghanistan. He decided to dispatch the SDF and the ships of

Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force (MSDF), to the Arabian Sea to provide logistical support for US military operations against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban.⁶

The Koizumi government's seven-point contribution to the US operations has the following elements:⁷

- Provision of logistical support for the US military: Japan would dispatch its SDF to provide support to the US forces, including medical services, transportation and supply.
- Strengthening of security around US facilities in Japan. It would take measures to strengthen protection of facilities and areas of the US forces and important facilities in Japan.
- Dispatch of MSDF ships to gather intelligence.
- Strengthening of international cooperation including information sharing in areas of immigration control.
- Providing \$40 million in emergency humanitarian aid to Pakistan and India, which were cooperating with the US; extending humanitarian and economic assistance to other surrounding and affected countries.⁸
- Providing assistance to displaced persons.

Since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe came to power in 2012, he has also used Japan's contribution to the 'war on terror' as a catalyst for the country to become more influential on the global stage. Japan's counterterrorism efforts were formulated to increase its global role in alliance with the US towards securing

peace in war-torn countries as Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, Japan itself fears it may face several terrorism-related threats, including trafficking of weapons and drugs, and kidnapping for ransom, feeding into terrorist financing.

JAPAN'S COUNTERTERRORISM POLICIES

Japan's most visible counterterrorism effort was the enactment of special anti-terrorism laws in 2001. It authorised its SDF to cooperate with and support anti-terrorism activities. Since then, SDF has provided logistical support in combating terrorism in Afghanistan. In November 2001, Koizumi's government also dispatched the MSDF to the Indian Ocean to support the military operations of the US in Afghanistan.⁹ It started providing transportation by its Air Self-Defence force in 2001 and supplied fuel to the US in the Indian Ocean. Tokyo has also been supporting the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions aimed at curbing terrorism worldwide. The deployment of MSDF vessels to support peacemaking in Afghanistan shows that it has not abided by its own Constitution regarding the 'Self-Defence' act. However, it has clarified that its assistance would be rendered only in 'non-combat' areas. The

Koizumi government maintains that it was not unconstitutional for the SDF to extend logistical support in such areas.¹⁰

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was established in 2001. It was authorised by the UN Security Council and has conducted several operations in Afghanistan to support the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). ISAF wanted Japan to send ground self-defence force helicopters for peacekeeping activities. Japan's participation in the war against terror – also called Operation Enduring Freedom – and ISAF was difficult due to its constitutional constraints, which forbid it from engaging in warfare internationally.¹¹

Japan is actively involved in the effort to prevent terrorist financing. It participates in anti-terrorist financial frameworks within the UN, and the G8 group of nations. Japan also made a provision for military support to the US by passing a law in 2003 which included special measures for humanitarian and reconstruction assistance. The law was designed to enable it to provide logistical support for US forces engaged in Operation Iraqi Freedom by dispatching the SDF. In 2003, Koizumi also authorised sending 1,000 non-combatant SDF personnel to Iraq to assist in the reconstruction efforts.¹²

In 2015, Japan laid down a three-pillar response to global terrorism:¹³

Strengthening counter-terrorism operations	Enhancing diplomacy towards stability and prosperity in the Middle East	Assisting in creating societies resilient to radicalisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Counterterrorism capacity-building assistance in the Middle East, Africa and Asia ● Enhancing multi/bilateral frameworks on counterterrorism ● Bolstering safety measures for Japanese nationals overseas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deploying a proactive Middle East diplomacy ● Assistance of \$200 million and further expansion of humanitarian aid ● Assisting regional economic/social stability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bringing about a vibrant and stable society ● Expanding people-to-people exchanges ● Coordinating with ASEAN to promote moderation.

The rise of militancy and terrorism has also posed direct threats to the Japanese people. Two Japanese citizens were beheaded by the Islamic State (IS) in 2015. In response to the incident, Prime Minister Abe reaffirmed his country's political and financial commitment to the coalition against IS. He said, "The international community will not give in to terrorism and we have to make sure that we work together."¹⁴ Japan also identified counterterrorism as a top priority during the G7 Summit meeting in May 2016 held in Japan.

JAPAN'S SUPPORT FOR AFGHANISTAN

After 9/11, the US-led multinational forces launched massive air strikes against the Taliban in Afghanistan, which led to the fall of the Taliban-run Afghan government. At the Bonn conference in 2001, Afghanistan and the international community came together to form a new government. The international community involved itself in state-building and recognised the importance of providing support, with the hope that Afghanistan does

not again become a haven for terrorists. Consequently, a new Afghan government led by President Hamid Karzai started the tortuous process of nation-building, which required support from the international community. The US expected Japan to play a strong diplomatic role. Then US President George W. Bush was appreciative of Japan's role in the Afghan conflict in sharing intelligence, and requested Japan to also play a role in operational areas.

Japan has expressed its deep concern over the rampant terrorist attacks in Kabul. In August 2018, a suicide attack occurred at an education centre on the western side of Kabul (Dashte Barchi),¹⁵ causing numerous deaths and injuries. Japan expressed solidarity with the government of Afghanistan. Tokyo has assured that it will continue to support the war-ravaged country to ensure stability, providing development aid, and humanitarian assistance.

One of the primary objectives of Japan's continued support of Afghanistan has been to

show solidarity with the US. The Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, revised in 1960, grants the US the right to military bases in Japan in exchange for a US pledge to defend Japan in the event of an attack. Moreover, with President Donald Trump's recent decision to pull out US troops from Afghanistan, it remains crucial for Japan to extend its role in the region. Prime Minister Abe will look into the possibility of amending Article 9 of the Constitution to do so.

Japan has its own economic interests as well. It wants to benefit from the reserves of oil, gas, uranium and other minerals available in Afghanistan and other Central Asian Republics. Afghanistan holds importance for Japan for its geo-political location as well.

Indeed, political instability in Afghanistan is inimical to global peace and a hindrance for trade with the Central Asian countries. Therefore, it is vital for Japan to support efforts to ensure stable trade relations with Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Japan took the first initiative in helping Afghanistan in 1996, when its Ambassador to the UN at that time, Hisashi Owada, expressed interest in holding a peace conference on Afghanistan in Tokyo.¹⁶ He held informal talks with Afghanistan's warring factions in an effort to bring their leaders together to the negotiating table. Japan has provided a total of US\$5.791 billion for Afghanistan's reconstruction since 2001.¹⁷

Japan's support to Afghanistan has been notable in three areas: helping the peace process, security cooperation, and reconstruction and humanitarian assistance.¹⁸

Peace and Political Process

Since 2001, Japan has provided important base access for the global operations of US military forces. It has provided naval supply ships in the Arabian Sea. Since the fall of the Taliban regime, Afghanistan has been working to establish a democratic government. To aid in these efforts, Japan dispatched legal experts and observers to Kabul to assist it in the formulation of a new Constitution and provided financial support for the presidential and parliamentary elections. Japan provided assistance to presidential and provincial council elections in Afghanistan in 2014, which involved transportation of polling materials. It also helped in capacity building of an independent election commission.¹⁹

Security Cooperation

Though there was much discussion in Japan on sending troops to Afghanistan, constitutional constraints prevented it from doing so. However, Japan has made extended efforts to promote Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), and Disbanding of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) in Afghanistan. DDR has turned out to be more successful than expected. A 2006 survey of former Afghan combatants indicated that around 90 percent of them had found employment after giving up arms, and about 92 percent were satisfied with the extended support for their social reintegration.²⁰

Japan's role in the security sector was also seen in the help it provided Afghanistan in increasing the size of its police force. The number of police officers in Afghanistan increased from 72,000 in 2008 to 157,000 in

2012.²¹ In close cooperation with UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization), Japan assisted in improving the literacy capacity and educational levels of the police officers. High-ranking officials of the Afghan Police were invited to Japan to receive training from the National Police Agency (NPA).²² Japan also helped to build facilities for border control and border police centres between Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries such as Pakistan, Iran and Tajikistan.

In 2014, the ISAF transferred authority for security issues to the government of Afghanistan.

Japan's role in Afghanistan is seen as well from the number of international conferences it has held to discuss the issues of nation-building in the war-torn country. Japan first held an international conference on reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan in January 2002. It aimed to bring different countries together to support the reconstruction process essential for bringing stability in the region, not only in Afghanistan

but also across West Asia and Central Asia, which have deep links to Japan. Tokyo's aid focused on resettlement of refugees, reconstruction, improving education and healthcare, empowerment of women, and removal of land mines. Japan would convene two more conferences in Tokyo in 2003 and 2006.²³

In July 2012, the Japanese and Afghan governments held yet another conference on Afghanistan in Tokyo. The aim was to support Afghanistan's development efforts towards achieving self-reliance during the transformation decade of 2015-2024. The war-torn region committed to effectively implement strategies for enduring growth and development during the transformation decade. Japan pledged to provide some US\$3 billion in assistance to Afghanistan in about five years from 2012 for socio-economic development and improving security capacity.²⁴

According to the Tokyo Declaration, the foremost need of the Afghan people was peace and security, and with the creation of the

Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance

- **Japan's support in enhancing Afghanistan's capacity to maintain security**

Supporting Afghanistan to take care of its own security responsibilities through assistance in setting salaries, training and education

- **Assistance for re-integration of ex-combatants**

Providing vocational training to ex-combatants

- **Assistance for Afghanistan's sustainable and self-reliant development**

Helping Afghanistan's sustainable development, focusing on the agricultural sector, infrastructure development and human resource development

Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), more than 75 percent of them would come under its protection.²⁵ However, the declaration also maintained that the region still had a long way to go to achieving a stable and self-sustaining Afghanistan. Under the Tokyo framework, Afghanistan agreed to implement its development strategy and improve its governance with transparency.

Infrastructure and Rural Development

At a joint conference of the US and Japan in September 2002, it was decided that both countries would assist the construction of a highway, the 'Ring Road' that would link the cities of Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat. Japan provided assistance for the 50 Km stretch of Kabul-Kandahar highway, and was constructed in 2003.²⁶ Additionally, since Japan aims to promote regional cooperation with neighbouring countries, it prioritised the construction of roads near the border with Pakistan and Uzbekistan. It also funded the development of local roads and the rehabilitation of airports in Bamiyan province, and ensured improvement of road maintenance capacity. The improvement of the Mazar-e-Sharif city road was completed in 2007 and the Bamiyan road in 2014 with Japan's assistance. Another major contribution of Japan was assistance in the construction of the Kabul international airport terminal.

Repatriation and reintegration of refugees was one of the biggest social issues Afghanistan faced in the process of nation-building. Japan led the international community in discussing the reintegration of ex-combatants. It disbursed US\$67 million to the peace and reintegration trust fund to

support the Government of Afghanistan (GOA)-led Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP), which started in 2010 and accounted for 30 percent of total disbursements.²⁷ For the inclusive development and resettlement of refugees, Tokyo has also carried out aid activities like building housing, providing basic infrastructure, providing drinking water, and promoting education and medical assistance.

Given the unstable security situation in Afghanistan, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is working out safety measures to reduce project risk and thereby increase economic growth, create jobs and ensure safe living for residents.²⁸ Japan also provides assistance for the development of agriculture. JICA has facilitated the rehabilitation of small-scale irrigation facilities and rural roads in the suburbs of Kabul, rehabilitation of community infrastructure in Nangarhar province, and is helping in develop strains of wheat ideal for the local environment and training people in growing them. It has augmented the functioning of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL), by strengthening the capacity of researchers, and capacity building in irrigation. Working with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), JICA has also helped build resilience and self-reliance of livestock keepers by teaching improved means of controlling foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) and other trans-boundary animal diseases.

Humanitarian Assistance

Education has been the primary focus of Japan's Overseas Development Assistance

(ODA), which has supported the construction and restoration of over 830 schools, helping more than one million students in Afghanistan. JICA undertook the training of 10,000 teachers and helped develop teaching materials and vocational training centres. It further helped to improve the quality of basic education, working with the United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF). In 2012, Japan pledged to provide 500 scholarships for Afghan students to pursue higher education in Japan. Primary school enrolment in Kabul has jumped from one million in 2001 to around 9.2 million in 2013.²⁹ Several Japanese universities, especially women's universities, have hosted Afghan professors for training and cultural exchanges. The first round of Afghan foreign exchange students in Japan graduated in 2012.³⁰

Human Resources Development: JICA has helped construction of a hospital for communicable diseases in Kabul, rehabilitation of the provincial hospital in Ghor Province, construction and development of around 97 clinics, and is providing equipment support to 100 clinics constructed by the US. It has worked for the improvement of maternal, newborn and child health in Afghanistan. JICA worked to improve access to safe drinking water and to expand public health service delivery.

JICA has provided food assistance to people affected by natural disasters. The UN World Food Programme (WFP) also provided humanitarian air service to transport aid workers, which helped in delivering relief goods in 2014. In 2013, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

provided return and reintegration support for Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons. Reintegration assistance was given to over 40,000 returnees by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in areas of transportation, shelter construction and vocational training.

Moreover, cooperation with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) allowed Japan to extend civilian assistance to areas where Japanese aid workers did not have direct access. Japan has closely collaborated with a Lithuanian-led PRT in Chaghcharan and provided assistance.

Japan also provided funds for the preservation of world cultural heritage – helping preserve the Bamiyan ruins, for instance, in cooperation with the UNESCO.

CONCLUSION

Japan's contribution to the 1991 Gulf War did not go beyond providing funds. In contrast, its response to 9/11 included swift, supportive action. One major reason for this was to avoid the embarrassment it had faced during the Gulf War. Japan has to strike a balance between upholding Article 9 of its Constitution and providing support to the war-torn countries of Afghanistan and Iraq. The September 11 attacks also brought up the issue of ensuring internal security of Japan against potential terrorist activities.

Even after many years of the Afghan conflict, the security situation in Afghanistan remains volatile. Despite security constraints, Japan had been steadily providing assistance to meet the needs of the region, in

cooperation with the government of Afghanistan and international organisations. The Japanese government maintains that dispatching its SDF was justified in the context of the Japan-US alliance. It is also a priority for Japan to strengthen solidarity with other states by participating in counterterrorism operations, and increasing its presence in Afghanistan.

Although the US-Japan alliance has greatly influenced Tokyo's approach to Afghanistan, Japan's role and interests within the region go beyond the alliance. They include Japan's presence on the international stage and its bid for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council. Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution restricts its involvement in combat areas. Indeed, Japan can play a bigger role in securing stability in Afghanistan if its Constitution is amended and it continues its assistance in the same manner.

The Japanese Defence force has 240,000 troops. Its US\$44-billion budget is the world's fifth-largest.³¹ Japan's reputation as an ally in counterterrorism operations will further improve if it dispatches its own personnel to fragile states where the international community is attempting to tackle terrorism.

Japan also needs to nurture its own interests in Afghanistan. Since Japan is highly dependent on West Asian countries for oil, it is vital for it to maintain its relationship with Afghanistan because of the latter's geopolitical significance.

The world views Afghanistan as a breeding ground for terrorism, and nations are committed to resolving this problem to attain global security. Japan is a strong advocate of peace and stability, and holds the potential to become one of the foremost nations in the war on terrorism. [ORF](#)

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