

## JAPAN'S ROLE IN THE POSTCONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION OF AFGHANISTAN: MOTIVES AND IMPLICATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

*The objective of this paper is to research the reasons why Japan has taken an active role in assisting Afghanistan and analyse how its activity contributed to its national interests and international image. While the realist paradigm is taken as the basic conceptual framework, applying the liberal approach also helps explain the rationale behind Japan's participation in the post-conflict settlement in Afghanistan. Analysis of Japan's foreign policy objectives in Afghanistan is carried out by the methods of content and event analysis, as well as the comparative method. The paper argues that Japan's assistance to Afghanistan reached the objectives of both demonstrating loyalty to the US and maintaining a favourable image in the Middle East and Central Asia, it enhanced Japan's international clout as a global civilian power. Japan's involvement in Afghanistan paved the way for closer cooperation with Europe and NATO and provided new ground for cooperation with SCO and Russia. While political interests have been maintained the economic benefits of Japan's involvement are less visible which leads to the conclusion that political motives prevailed in Japan's realization of its role in Afghanistan.*

**Keywords:** Japan, Afghanistan, ODA, reconstruction, peacebuilding

### INTRODUCTION

For many years, the situation in Afghanistan remains one of the serious challenges to regional security. Attempts to ensure the stability of the regime through the presence of foreign troops have proved unsuccessful, and after the withdrawal of the American military forces in 2021, the Taliban government came to power which questions the meaning of all the efforts that have been put into the post-conflict reconstruction of this country.

Japan has been an active player in the settlement of the Afghanistan issue for many years. Its activity has been multifaceted, and it includes assistance in the reconstruction of the country, diplomatic efforts to draw attention to the problems of Afghanistan, helping the Afghan refugees, fostering the economic recovery of the country and assistance in state building, participation in efforts to strengthen peace and preserve the cultural heritage. From 2001 to 2021, Japan allocated \$6.9 billion of official development assistance to Afghanistan, becoming one of the major donors of this country. All this demonstrated Japan's tangible presence in the peacebuilding process in this country.

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This raises the question of why Japan has been so eager to direct considerable economic and diplomatic resources into Afghanistan's peacebuilding. In Japan's national security, Afghanistan is not a priority country. It does not have a common security agenda stemming from common borders. Afghanistan is not a supplier of energy resources or other critical minerals for Japan. This paper suggests several explanations based on the realist approach. At the same time, it argues that the realist approach alone has certain limits in analysing Japan's policy towards Afghanistan, and using the liberal approach gives a broader perspective of Japan's motives for Afghanistan's assistance. To analyze Japanese participation in solving the problems of Afghanistan, a historical review of Japanese initiatives towards this country was made, and its activities were analyzed before September 11, 2001, during and after Operation Enduring Freedom, as well as after the announcement of the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan.

### **JAPAN'S FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES IN AFGHANISTAN**

Japan's eagerness to take part in the assistance to Afghanistan raises a question of the motives of its considerable activity in this country. Ashizawa (2014) outlined three major objectives of Japan's assistance to Afghanistan: strengthening the United States (US)-Japan alliance, demonstrating Japan's major contribution to global peace and security and forging a good relationship with newly born Afghanistan. This classification could be further expanded by specifying Japan's contribution to peace and security both militarily by sending the Self Defense Forces to the Indian Ocean and non-militarily by humanitarian and reconstruction assistance, largely focusing on human security projects. Japan's international contribution can be seen not only in the sphere of security but also in the cultural sphere, which was demonstrated by her attempts to save the Buddhist heritage in Afghanistan. As far as forging a good relationship with Afghanistan is concerned, the importance of this country to Japan can be explained by its location as a transit route for the resources of Central Asia, its significance to the stability of the Middle East and Central Asia where Japan has crucial economic interests, as well as its natural resources. These objectives will be researched in the paper and Japan's activity in Afghanistan will be analysed through the lens of these objectives to answer the question of whether Japan has reached its objectives and whether its policy towards Afghanistan can be called successful.

Japan's foreign policy has been greatly influenced by its alliance with the US, and the US factor in Japan's activity in Afghanistan cannot be underestimated. The US-Japan alliance has been a cornerstone of Japan's security policy for decades. The relationship within the alliance is often characterized in terms of abandonment and entrapment when the fear of abandonment by its ally prompts Japan to support the US's military operations even when this does not necessarily contribute to Japan's security. Japan's contribution to the stabilization of Afghanistan was largely dictated by its military alliance with the US. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Japan demonstrated solidarity with the US and in an unprecedented quick move adopted a Special measures antiterrorism law which enabled the government to send the Self Defense Forces (SDF) to the Indian Ocean to help the coalition.

Japan's assistance to Afghanistan also was part of its commitment to the alliance, it was discussed bilaterally in the early stages of Operation Enduring Freedom. Tokyo

stepped up its assistance measures to Afghanistan upon the request of the White House. Japan's contribution can be seen as an example of 'burden-sharing' in situations when the US-led military campaign is supported by humanitarian or reconstruction assistance from Japan. The rationale behind such behaviour is based on the expectations of US support in the issues concerning Japan's national security, such as the North Korean issue and the balancing of China.

At the same time Japan's mission in the Indian Ocean was not only a response to the US request to show "boots on the ground" during Operation Enduring Freedom, but also reflected the aspirations of the realists and revisionists in Japan who wanted to remove the postwar constraints on Japan's military. The decision to sail tankers to Diego Garcia was its first step toward collective self-defence and global security role (Samuels, 2007). This decision reflects the growth of realism in Japan's foreign policy from the early 2000s.

Japan's involvement in Afghanistan can be explained by the desire to enhance its international security role. However, this role did not only imply sending the SDF abroad but it can be considered more broadly. Japan's role as a non-military security provider can be analysed through the liberal lens as it envisaged Japan's leadership in international cooperation on various global issues. A major part of Japan's security role was based on its approach embracing 'comprehensive security' which includes not only military but economic and other dimensions of security. While the concept of comprehensive security first appeared in Japan in the early 1980s, in the 1990s Japan embraced the UN concept of human security which in part resembled the comprehensive security concept. Human security even became of the foreign policy pillars as Japan was hoping that the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 would open the way to the UN Security Council reform, but later this concept transformed into one of the pillars of ODA policy. Japan has been promoting the human security concept, and its reconstruction assistance projects aimed at empowering communities have become an indispensable part of its foreign policy. Focusing on human security underpinned Japan's contribution to international security in a non-military way and supported its claim to the UN Security Council permanent seat.

Japan's attention to the reconstruction assistance and focus on the human security aspects of assistance can also be explained in the context of trying to neutralise the effect of sending the SDF to the Indian Ocean. While the military dispatch was viewed cautiously by Japan's neighbours and the SDF's participation in the US-led campaign threatened to tarnish the image of Japan in the Middle East, its efforts at helping the people of Afghanistan, on the contrary, helped create a favourable image of Japan in the region it depends upon as a main source of hydrocarbons.

One more aspect of Japan's international contribution which is not related to security is Japan's efforts to preserve the heritage of the Silk Road. This activity is a manifestation of Japan's international cultural cooperation and its contribution to the work of UNESCO. Japan has carried out numerous projects aimed at the restoration of the objects of the Silk Road in Central Asia, and its activity directed at saving the Buddhist statues in Bamiyan as well as its later work to restore the images can be attributed to its international cooperation at preserving the Buddhist heritage of the region. This activity is also aimed at demonstrating Japan's status as a country directly related to the Silk Road, which is important in its regional strategy towards Eurasia.

As was earlier pointed out, one of Japan's objectives was forging a good relationship with Afghanistan. The realist approach helps single out motives behind the desire to establish friendly relations with this country. Japan has no direct threats to national security from Afghanistan. It cited the fight against terrorism as the rationale for joining the US-led campaign. However, Japan's joining the US increased the threat of terror attacks because it could become a target for terrorists because of being a US ally. Japan's realism in foreign policy is often seen as directed at reaching economic aims, and some analysts characterised it by the term 'mercantile realism'. Japan is poor in mineral resources and its need for rare metals and other resources can be regarded as one of the reasons behind its involvement in Afghanistan. Thus, gaining access to Afghanistan's resources as a motive for strengthening its footing in Afghanistan should be researched. Moreover, Japan's interest in the stabilization of Afghanistan is linked to its significance as a transit route for mineral resources in the region of Central Asia. Since the early 1990s, Japanese companies have been studying projects aimed at unblocking the resources of gas-rich Turkmenistan and other neighbouring countries, and Afghanistan naturally was considered as one of the routes to realise this idea.

In general, Japan's interest in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the Eurasian diplomacy and Silk Road diplomacy put forward by prime minister Hashimoto in 1997 symbolized Japan's growing interest towards Central Asia. Tokyo understood that until there was peace in Afghanistan, there would be no stability in Central Asia since the war in Afghanistan was closely connected with the war in Tajikistan. It is argued that after the end of the Cold War Japan's activity in Eurasia increased and its sphere of interests has been expanding, thus bringing more focus on the importance of the stability of Afghanistan to the realization of its strategic goals in Central Asia and Eurasia.

While the chronological approach was taken as the basis of the research, the thematic approach was used as well. The activities of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces in the Indian ocean conducting replenishment operations for the international counter-terrorism coalition, the issue of Japan's non-participation in the International Security Assistance Force of Afghanistan (ISAF), as well as Japan's assistance in the sphere of military security of Afghanistan were considered. Special attention was paid to the role of Japan in promoting the post-conflict political and economic reconstruction of Afghanistan, as well as its initiatives to preserve the cultural heritage of the region.

## **OVERVIEW OF JAPAN'S INITIATIVES IN AFGHANISTAN BEFORE 2001**

Japanese assistance to Afghanistan has a rather long history. Since the late 1960s Tokyo provided technical cooperation through official development assistance in the development of the water supply system in various provinces, in the field of combating infectious diseases. With the help of Japan, in 1978 the first colour television centre was established in Kabul. After the Soviet Union sent troops to Afghanistan Japan halted its contact with Afghanistan. It was in 1988 when a Japanese diplomat was sent to Afghanistan to work with the United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan to oversee post-conflict reconciliation following the signing of the Geneva Accords that ended the war. This was the first time since the end of World War II that Japan had taken part in UN conflict resolution efforts (Takahashi, 1998). According to the former high-ranking diplomat Togo, the fact that the representative of Japan took

part in this particular mission was not accidental, since by the mid-1980s there was an understanding in Japan that the fate of Afghanistan would have a serious impact on the situation in the Middle East and on peace and stability in the southwestern part of the Eurasian continent (Togo, 2010).

Japan's policy towards Afghanistan in the 1990s was developing mainly in two directions - the provision of humanitarian assistance and efforts aimed at fostering peace negotiations between the warring parties. Tokyo provided international assistance to refugees through the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and other UN organizations, as well as through community assistance projects. In 1997, together with the UN, the Azra and Tizin projects were implemented, aimed at returning refugees to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries (Ogata, 2002).

While at the official level Japan supported the efforts of the 6 + 2 Group (Russia, USA, China, Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) to resolve the situation in Afghanistan, it also sought to implement its independent initiatives in this country. Since 1996, Japan has been trying to mediate the peace process between the parties to the conflict. Representatives of the warring parties were invited to Tokyo, however, since they refused to take part in a general meeting, Japan held separate talks with them to discuss the prospects for achieving reconciliation.

The main idea behind Japan's activities was to organize a peace conference on Afghanistan with the participation of all interested parties. Tokyo's efforts were based on its successful track record in promoting a peace settlement in Cambodia in the early 1990s. Speaking at the fourth meeting of the Afghanistan Support Group, the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Machimura mentioned Cambodia as an example of the importance of consistently calling on the parties to take part in building peace (MOFA, 1998). At the same time, he called the war in Afghanistan "another tragedy in Asia", thus implying that Japan, as an Asian country, has a certain responsibility and right to participate in the peace process (MOFA, 1998).

At about the same time, Tokyo was making attempts to promote the peace process in neighbouring Tajikistan. In 1998 Japan sent its representative to Tajikistan after the end of the civil war as part of the UN Mission in Tajikistan. The Japanese Foreign Ministry sponsored seminars on democracy and good governance in Tajikistan, where government officials and members of the opposition could meet and discuss post-reconciliation reconstruction and state building (MOFA, 1999). The aim of the seminars was also the promotion of the process of democratization and social and economic rehabilitation of the country by sharing with local representatives the experience of modernization and democratization in Japan and the peace process in other countries. In reviewing negotiations with the Taliban from 1996 to 2001, Japan cited the example of reconciliation in Tajikistan as a guide for Afghanistan (MOFA, 2012a).

Japan's interest in Afghanistan was prompted not only by the necessity to prevent destabilization of the broader region of the Middle East and Central Asia but also by economic motives of using Afghanistan as the transit route for energy resources of gas-rich Turkmenistan. At the beginning of the 1990s when Japan established diplomatic relations with the former republics of Central Asia, it began to study ways to unblock this region and export its mineral resources to markets other than Russia. In 1997, the Japanese companies "Itochu" with a 6.5% share and "Inpex" with a 6.5%

share joined the consortium for the construction of the Trans-Afghan pipeline which had been formed in 1995 by American company “Unocal” and the company from Saudi Arabia “Delta.” However, the events in Afghanistan upset the plans for the pipeline construction. In 1998, “Unocal” announced its withdrawal from the consortium, and it was frozen indefinitely (Rashid, 2003).

## **JAPAN IN AFGHANISTAN AFTER 2001: MILITARY INVOLVEMENT AND SECURITY ASSISTANCE**

Japan's activity in Afghanistan has increased significantly after 2001 and it has acquired a new dimension. In response to the attack on the US, Japan soon indicated its intention to take part in the global war on terrorism, and its discussion took less than a month, and Diet deliberation was swifter than on any security issue in the memory (Samuels, 2007). The law allowed the Self-Defense Forces to provide non-combat logistical support to the coalition forces. The law was limited to two years with the possibility of renewal.

Participation in the antiterrorist campaign for the first time marked the Japanese military presence in the Middle East. Later the expanding scope of its security interests was reflected in the 2005 National Defense Program guidelines saying that 'the region spreading from the Middle East to East Asia is critical to Japan, thereby mapping Japan's security interests onto those of the US in the 'arc of instability' (Hughes, 2009). At the same time, Japan was cautious so as not to harm its relations with the countries of the Middle East. This was demonstrated by its energetic diplomatic efforts when the Japanese envoys visited the states of the Middle East explaining that Japan's support for the US-led military campaign is not directed against the Islam world.

Japan's military involvement in Afghanistan did not go beyond logistic support for the coalition in the Indian Ocean. Japan refused to join the UN International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF), which had been operating in Afghanistan since December 2001 because saw it as a risk of violating article 9 of the Constitution which according to the government interpretation of that time, prohibited the right of collective self-defence and made it impossible to send the SDF to combat zones. The decision to take part in the OEF but not to join ISAF was criticized by the opposition Democratic party leader Ichiro Ozawa who argued that SDF should withdraw from the naval mission and instead be dispatched to the UN-authorized ISAF.

The idea of increasing the SDF involvement was repeatedly discussed in 2007-2008, during the tenure of prime ministers Abe and Fukuda. Abe who was a keen proponent of closer cooperation between Japan and NATO mentioned the desire to expand cooperation in Afghanistan and it resulted in increasing the number of human security projects Japan carried out together with NATO provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) and establishing the post of Japan's liaison officer to the NATO senior civil representative in Kabul (MOFA, 2007) Fukuda sent a research mission to study the possibility of cooperation between Japan and ISAF in Afghanistan, which issued a report stating the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, and the idea of sending Self-Defense Forces was discarded as too dangerous. Against the backdrop of the weakness of the ruling coalition and a series of scandals in Japan's Ministry of Defense, the population opposed further involvement in American operations.

When the opposition Democratic Party of Japan came to power in 2009, a decision to withdraw the Self-Defense Forces from the Indian Ocean was made (Parry, 2009). This symbolized a shift to a more independent foreign policy course and a desire to stop the now unpopular mission and focus on non-military issues that would allow combating terrorism in "a manner best suited to Japan."

While the military presence of Japan was limited, Japan has from the very beginning looking at alternative ways to increase its role in Afghanistan. Speaking before the UN General Assembly, former Prime Minister Miyazawa said that "Japan intends to play an active role in the peace process and the reconstruction of Afghanistan," however, official Tokyo preferred to stay away from the attempts at national reconciliation, since it did not have sufficient diplomatic influence in this sphere, but instead focused on assisting the socio-economic recovery of the country.

A more rational and familiar option was for Japan to focus on economic contributions. In November 2001, Japan officially announced its intention to host a major international event dedicated to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The Tokyo Conference was held in January 2002, attended by representatives from 60 countries and 20 international organizations. The conference resulted in a pledge to donate about 4.5 billion dollars, with Japan's contribution amounting to 500 million dollars. Japan hoped to simultaneously fulfil its obligation to the United States and consolidate its presence in the region without incurring the risks of military actions (Heginbotham & Samuels, 2002).

In the first stage, Japan's main efforts included assistance to refugees, demining activities, health care, education, and women's rights. However, it soon had to restructure its assistance as it became clear that the issue of security was a precondition for recovery and reconciliation (Miyahara, 2003).

The Security Sector Reform Plan was adopted at the April 2002 G8 Donor Meeting, and it was decided that Japan would take the lead in the efforts to implement the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program aimed at disarming the Afghan militants (Sedra, 2003). The DDR was aimed at disarming the Afghan military and was a politically sensitive issue. Initially, the Japanese government was criticized for failing to provide a realistic solution for the speedy implementation of the program. Japan acted slowly and did not show any initiative or leadership in the process, gradually seeking to place full responsibility for the UN Mission in Afghanistan. Sedra (2003) concludes that in accepting the role of the country responsible for DDR, Japanese officials did not quite understand what this role meant and required. Japanese officials thought they could contribute only to the reintegration part. Various sources noted that the decision to participate in the DDR was not a well-defined and carefully calculated strategy, but a spontaneous one. In an attempt to boost the process, Japan convened a Consolidation of Peace Conference in February 2003, which resulted in more than \$50 million being allocated to the Afghanistan New Beginnings program aimed at disarming, demobilising and reintegrating former combatants. Notwithstanding criticism, Japan's role in assisting the security sector has become one of its main contributions to Afghanistan, valued internationally (NATO, 2011). The DDR program was completed in 2006, followed by the implementation of the Disbandment of illegal armed groups (DIAG) program. Overall, about 60, 000 ex-combatants were disarmed and a total of 737 groups were disbanded (MOFA, 2015). Together with the UK, Japan established the Peace and Reintegration Trust Fund to

support the government of Afghanistan-led peace and reintegration program through which it disbursed about 67 million dollars, carrying out various projects for the reintegration and training of former Taliban soldiers (MOFA, 2015). Tokyo also led international discussions on the reintegration of the former combatants. One more aspect of Japan's security assistance was its efforts to develop the capacity of the Afghan security forces. This included the provision of salaries to the Afghan National Police (in 2010, Japan funded salaries for 6 months), the establishment of police and border control training centres in Afghanistan, as well as training in Japan. Issues of counter-narcotics, demining, border control management and munition stockpiles management have become an important part of Japan's activity in Afghanistan.

### **Reconstruction Assistance and Consolidation of Peace**

The country's participation in peace enforcement has been replaced by a reinvigorated human security performance with its links to ODA (Hynek, 2012). Japan's reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan was based on the newly established concept of "consolidation of peace" put forward by Foreign Minister Y. Kawaguchi on the eve of her first visit to Afghanistan (MOFA, 2002). It provides assistance in three areas: the political process - domestic security, reconstruction and humanitarian assistance. Peacebuilding has become an inextricable part of Japan's foreign policy and in the 2003 ODA Charter, peacebuilding was declared one of the objectives of development assistance, which now was used to promote peace and nation-building in post-conflict situations.

Part of the reconstruction assistance in the non-military sphere was centred around the political process. Japan helped draft the constitution of Afghanistan, and assisted in holding presidential and parliamentary elections, completing this part of the implementation of the concept by December 2005 (MOFA, 2007). Being a non-Western democratic country Japan shared its experience and outlook on democratic state-building. As a result of this activity, Japan managed to establish close contact with Kabul: bilateral visits took place almost every month, and in 2010 the two countries agreed to establish a political consultations mechanism.

Humanitarian assistance was carried out following the concept put forward by Sadako Ogata which provided for a smooth transition from humanitarian assistance to reconstruction, with particular emphasis on the development of the provinces. From the very beginning of the counter-terrorism campaign, Japan created a "Japanese Platform" target pool from which NGO assistance came. The government has repeatedly stressed the importance of an "all Japan" approach to the issue of Afghanistan, emphasizing the collaboration of the government and NGOs.

Japan emphasized agriculture and rural development, infrastructure, and human resources development. Most of its ODA to Afghanistan was represented by multilateral and bilateral grant assistance aimed at creating better living conditions. This helped form an image of Japan as a country helping common people and steered positive sentiments towards Japan.

Japan's focus on reconstruction assistance had important implications as it helped establish cooperation with NATO in Afghanistan without being involved in military activities. Ever since S. Abe announced the expansion of cooperation between Japan and NATO in 2007, joint projects of cooperation with the PRTs were launched.



In cooperation with the PRTs, it has carried out more than 120 projects with 16 PRTs in such areas as education, medicine and health care and other areas. Cooperation in Afghanistan has become a milestone in Japan's NATO relations, and it paved the way for further rapprochement as Japan was recognized as NATO global partner.

## **JAPAN'S REGIONAL INITIATIVES AND AFGHANISTAN ISSUE**

One of the aspects of Japan's reconstruction assistance was the development of infrastructure in Afghanistan and increasing its connection to the bordering countries. Japan assisted in the construction of a ring road connecting Kabul - Kandahar - Herat, roads on the borders of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan, a bridge connecting Afghanistan and Tajikistan and other infrastructure facilities in Tajikistan. Central Asia has become an important element in Afghanistan's reconstruction and economic development since the beginning of the Afghanistan operation.

The Afghan issue has become part of the agenda of the multilateral dialogue between Central Asia plus Japan, initiated by Tokyo in 2004 (Dobrinskaya, 2020). Although the main aim of this dialogue is fostering intraregional cooperation within the five former Soviet republics of Central Asia, Japan also saw it as a possible platform for integrating Afghanistan into the process of regional cooperation. Since 2005, Afghanistan has been included in the program of regional economic cooperation in Central Asia under the auspices of the Asian Development Bank, where Japan is one of the decision-makers. Tokyo has repeatedly stressed the link between development in Central Asia and stability in Afghanistan. In 2006, Afghanistan was invited as an observer to the meeting of foreign ministers of the dialogue. In 2006, Japanese Foreign Minister Aso put forward the concept of a "Peace and Stability Corridor" connecting Central Asia and Afghanistan (MOFA, 2006). It was based on a broad approach to the region, emphasizing the interconnectedness of the security of Afghanistan and Central Asia, open regional cooperation, and partnership based on universal values. Aso underlined the importance of the construction of the "Southern Route" from Central Asia to Pakistan through Afghanistan, which would allow trade and commerce to be established in the region. Japan's approach resembled the concept of Greater Central Asia championed by Washington. A few years later Japan voiced support for the US concept of a "New Silk Road", which aimed at integrating Afghanistan with Central Asia via trade and economic cooperation. At the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan in 2012, Foreign Minister Gemba reiterated that Japan would continue to assist in the construction of a corridor through Afghanistan (MOFA, 2012c).

Another way of economically engaging Afghanistan could be the revival of the idea of the gas pipeline from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan (later the decision was made to stretch it to India) - Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline (TAPI). As stated earlier, this idea attracted the attention of Japanese companies in the 1990s. Since the beginning of the 2000s, Japan has again indicated its interest, this topic was discussed during the visit of the Silk Road Energy Mission to Turkmenistan in 2002. However, this interest did not result in any further steps by Japanese companies. The idea of the pipeline was supported by the Asian Development Bank, where Japan and the US are the main shareholders. For Japan, in the mid-2000s this project had more political than economic significance since it could become an element that unites the countries of Central Asia, Afghanistan and other neighbouring

states, a new route to diversify the supply of the resources of Turkmenistan to the outer market. Recently Japan has shown more practical economic interest in the project. In 2016 a consortium of Japanese companies (Chiyoda, Mitsubishi, JJC, Itochu, Sojits) won the tender for the development of the Galkynysh field, the starting point of the gas pipeline, followed by the US\$1 billion offer by the ADB to finance the project (Mohmand, 2018). Japanese companies received an invitation from the President of Turkmenistan to participate in the construction of TAPI.

Another idea about increasing connectivity in the region centred around possible Japan-Iran-India cooperation. According to Sano, the development of the Iranian port of Chabahar and the Zaranj-Delaram highway, where India played an important role with the support of Japan, would allow Tokyo and New Delhi to establish access to Central Asian countries bypassing Pakistan (Sano, 2018). Japan, together with India, announced its intention to invest in the port and support the establishment of a regional logistics hub around the port. According to the Nikkei newspaper, Japan was expected to start developing concrete plans by the end of 2016 through Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) (“Japan eyes Iran infrastructure development”, *asa* 2016). The Japanese government hoped that the territory could be turned into a trade centre for the countries of Central Asia, and the port could become a logistics hub for Iran and Afghanistan. The situation around Iran prevented Japan from further developing the plan, which is another example of how geopolitical risks hamper its infrastructure initiatives in the region.

The issue of Afghanistan led to an increase in Japan's diplomatic activity towards the neighbouring countries. For example, in April 2009, Japan hosted an international conference on aid to Pakistan, which pledged US\$5 billion, with Japan contributing US\$1 billion (MOFA, 2009). At the same time, Japan tried to establish cooperation with Iran. At the 2009 Pakistan Donor Conference, a meeting between representatives of Iran and the United States was organized by Japan. Almost at the same time, Japan and Iran agreed to cooperate in areas such as border control, humanitarian cooperation, and agriculture in Afghanistan. In 2015, the leaders of Japan and Kazakhstan came to an agreement on the joint implementation of the pilot project "Assistance to Kazakhstan in cooperation with Afghanistan in the field of official development assistance." As one of the leading donor countries Japan was invited to a Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) conference on Afghanistan, held in March 2010 in Moscow. Japan and Russia established a program of training anti-narcotic drug officers for Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Japan's regional role was also characterized by utilizing the “second track” approach based on informal channels. For example, in November 2009 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs sponsored a round table on peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan in Tokyo, where delegates from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran were present. In June 2012, a conference was organized by Doshisha university, where President Hamid Karzai's adviser Stanekzai and a representative of the Taliban Political Council took part, which was an unusual occurrence amid the conflict between the insurgency and the Afghan and U.S. governments. It was very rare for senior Taliban officials to participate in public events abroad, let alone those also attended by Afghan government representatives (Totakhil & Hodge, 2012). Japan was trying to establish informal contacts between the conflicting parties, and exploring the prospects for their

possible interaction, thus returning to the role of a mediator, which she tried to play in the 1990s.

One more aspect of Japan's role in Afghanistan is based on the emphasis it puts on the common historical and religious heritage of the Silk Road region. It made great efforts to prevent the destruction of the Buddha statues in Bamiyan in 2001. An official delegation consisting of members of the ruling party visited Afghanistan, and letters were sent to the Gulf countries asking for help to convince the Taliban not to destroy the statues, Japan even offered to hide them or take them apart and move out of the country. After the Taliban destroyed the statues, the Japanese government stopped all political contact with them. In 2004, Japan, together with UNESCO and the government of Afghanistan, implemented a project to preserve the ruins of Bamiyan, allocating almost \$ 2 million for this aim. In 2017, Tokyo hosted several meetings of international experts on the future of Buddhist monuments.

### **JAPAN'S POLICY TOWARDS AFGHANISTAN AFTER 2014**

The prospect of the US military withdrawal and the shift to the independent development of Afghanistan presented new challenges and opportunities to Japan. It showed determination to continue efforts aimed at turning Afghanistan into a politically and economically autonomous state during the so-called "Transformational Decade" of 2014-2024. Japan's basic approach was Afghanistan's self-efforts as a pre-requisite to Japan's assistance. By the time the decision to decrease US presence in Afghanistan was announced, Japan had played a leading role in organizing two major donor conferences in 2002 and 2012. The 2012 Tokyo conference resulted in a pledge to contribute about 16 billion dollars within the next four years, with Japan contributing about three billion dollars. According to Japan's proposal at the 2012 conference, the new strategy of international aid was adopted based on the principle of mutual responsibility. The strategy implied that the Afghan government would fulfil its promises to fight corruption and take measures towards good governance the donors would commit themselves to deliver on their financial pledges. Assistance would be carried out for concrete projects listed by the Karzai government and the results would be reviewed at the follow-up meetings every two years. The strategy brought more structure to the direction of Afghanistan's development in terms of making the assistance process more transparent. At the London Conference in 2014, the Japanese representative Takahashi assured that Japan was ready to continue to assist in supporting the reform program carried out by the Afghan leadership (MOFA, 2014). Japan attached particular importance to efforts to fight corruption, establish independent development, as well as ensure economic and fiscal sustainability and improve the living conditions of women and children. The "transformational decade" presented Japan with opportunities to further increase its international clout as one of the main donors and planners of Afghanistan's reconstruction but Japan's efforts in the sphere of development could only succeed if political stability and security could be maintained.

This stance was reaffirmed at the meeting of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe with President Ghani in 2016. Prime Minister Abe expressed Japan's intention to support Afghanistan's efforts to achieve self-reliance and stability (MOFA, 2016). Japan emphasized the importance of Afghanistan's contributions in areas such as improving

the security situation and administrative reforms so that the assistance of the international community can bear fruit. Japan announced new plans to support the government of Afghanistan at the Geneva Conference in November 2020. Japan's foreign minister Motegi said that from 2021 to 2024 Japan would annually allocate about 180 million dollars to help reforms, which would be carried out by the government of Afghanistan (MOFA, 2020). Security assistance centred on strengthening the police capacities, and development assistance was mainly directed at agricultural development, assistance to rural areas, infrastructure development, education, healthcare, as well as human resource development. Japan's main idea was that the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process should be realized and that it was necessary to maintain the nation-building gains made over 20 years.

The return to power of the Taliban in August 2021 led to the closure of Japan's embassy and moving it to Qatar. While about 500 Afghans who collaborated with Japanese projects tried to leave Afghanistan, it was on August 23, eight days after the fall of Kabul that Japan took a decision to send a transport plane, and only managed to evacuate 15 persons, on August 31 ending the evacuation mission and opting to use the third-party planes. Since then, Japan has continued to negotiate with Taliban representatives in Qatar to evacuate the rest (Nagao, 2022). Formally Japan's decision not to dispatch SDF aircraft on a rescue mission to Afghanistan was based on the assessment of the security situation in Afghanistan, and it is also worth noting that the Taliban leadership protested against the presence of Japan's military ("We want Japanese to stay, says Taliban spokesperson", 2021).

Japan opened its border to the refugees from Afghanistan and some regulations were especially eased for them to enter the country. However, Japan's reception of the refugees contrasted with its outstanding enthusiasm for helping evacuees from Ukraine, and that was noted by some analysts as the manifestation of double standards (Asakura, 2022). The issue of Afghanistan ceased to prevail in the US-Japan global security agenda and now the showcase of Japan's commitment to the alliance agenda became Japan's response to the situation in Ukraine. It was only in August 2022 that Japan granted refugee status to 98 Afghans. According to Justice Minister Hanashi, Japan has granted refugee status to 133 people who have fled Afghanistan in the year since the Taliban returned to power. It is estimated that around 800 people have fled Afghanistan for Japan ("Japan approves 133 Afghan refugees since Taliban's return to power", 2022).

The second issue Japan is facing is how to deal with the Taliban government. Japan did not officially criticize the Taliban's seizure of power. It is demonstrating a cautious wait-and-see approach towards the Taliban closely watching other countries' moves. A month after the Americans had their first face-to-face meeting with the Taliban since their return, the Japanese ambassador paid a 4-day visit to Afghanistan in November 2021. Ambassador Okada met with senior members of the Taliban, including Deputy Chairman of the Interim Government Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, and urged them to ensure the safety of Japanese citizens and local personnel. The Ambassador confirmed Japan's intention to carry on humanitarian assistance through international organizations and stressed the importance of respecting human rights, creating an inclusive political system, and preventing Afghanistan from becoming a haven for terrorism. Three meetings have been held so far and Japan has confirmed its intention to continue its engagement with the Taliban (MOFA, 2022). It is reported that

the new Taliban leadership calls for cooperation from Japan saying they do not want the Japanese to leave (“We want Japanese to stay, says Taliban spokesperson”, 2021).

The return of the Taliban did not stop Japan’s assistance and on December 20, 2021, the Japanese government officially announced its plan to provide a total of approximately \$109 million to help address the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and affected neighbouring countries. Those funds are allocated for health, food and nutrition, protection, water supply and sanitation, and improving living conditions in Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries, including Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan through 16 international organizations to improve the humanitarian situation.

Japan's history of building ties with the representatives of various political groups in Afghanistan, coupled with its reputation as a rich country which has for decades assisted Afghanistan, contributing to its communities, gives it leverage in the current situation of talks with the Taliban. Japan's international reputation as one of the proactive contributors and one of the non-Western leaders of donor assistance opens the way for establishing new patterns of cooperation in Afghanistan with states interested in stabilizing this country. From Japan’s perspective efforts by Russia, China and other neighbours of Afghanistan can be viewed as positive steps directed at the shared goal of its stabilization. At the same time for Japan Afghanistan in the long term may become a new venue for cooperation with the US and India against China (Nagao, 2022). The activity of China and the possibility of increasing its presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan present certain geopolitical challenges to Japan. If China supports Pakistan, and the Taliban at the same time, India will face a formidable China-Pakistan-Taliban alliance (Nagao, 2022). The change in the balance of power might require India to focus its attention on balancing China on the mainland while distracting resources from containing China at sea. The future direction of the developments in Afghanistan will have important implications for Japan's regional strategy and global strategy.

## **RESULTS**

The conducted study allows us to outline the following results. First, Japan has sought to establish a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan since the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. Its initial interest towards Afghanistan was largely based on its desire to enhance its global role and make a contribution to international peace and security focusing on nonmilitary aspects of security, such as refugee assistance and the reconciliation process. After the end of the Cold War, Japan sought to increase its political clout and play a more prominent role in the international arena, placing focus on the liberal agenda of international cooperation in post-conflict peacebuilding and other aspects of security and stability on the global scale. Its aspirations towards gaining a permanent seat in the UN Security Council were underpinned by its contribution to security in a broad sense, including economic and humanitarian aspects, and its role in international cultural cooperation. This reflected both its quest for leadership in the global nonmilitary security sphere as a global civilian power and the desire to consolidate its presence in different regions of the world.

From the 2000s realism prevailed in Japanese foreign policy and Japan’s strategy in Afghanistan became mostly a reflection of its commitment to the alliance

with the US. The situation after 9/11, against the backdrop of strong public support for prime minister Junichiro Koizumi and the dominance of the pro-alliance realists in Japan, was relatively easy to adopt a law enabling the SDF dispatch to the logistic support mission in the Indian Ocean. However, as time went by and especially after Japan supported the US military operation in Iraq, public support for the SDF mission in Afghanistan waned and this finally resulted in the ending of the mission. The SDF's dispatch to the Indian Ocean was largely a symbolic move, but it had political implications and brought Japan certain benefits. Koizumi wanted to preempt the criticism that followed Japan's response after the Gulf War a decade ago (Katzenstein, 2008) and this Japan's contribution was highly praised in Washington. By supporting the Bush administration in Afghanistan and Iraq, Koizumi was able to get US support for pressing North Korea to come clean about its abductions of Japanese citizens (Berger et al., 2007). In the atmosphere of trust which existed between Bush and Koizumi, the two countries launched the process of the realignment of the US forces, outlined their common strategic objectives and took the alliance to a new level of cooperation.

Adopting the Antiterrorism special measures law was also an important step in the direction of gradual removal of the postwar constraints on Japan's security policy. The September 11 attacks provided Japan with a good opportunity to take a further step toward becoming a more active player (Berger et al., 62). It paved the way for the legislation expanding the SDF missions and the geographic scope of their activities abroad. At the same time, Japan was able to ensure that its contribution to the US Afghanistan campaign did not harm its relations with the energy suppliers in the Middle East. As far as possible, Japan has tried to limit its involvement in Afghanistan to humanitarian and reconstruction assistance, and it is the activity in the field of non-military security that characterizes Japan as an important player in this region.

Although Japan used its traditional tool of “chequebook diplomacy”, in Afghanistan it was enhanced by active diplomatic leadership in the peacebuilding process and involvement in all spheres of the post-conflict reconstruction, including security and demilitarization, political process and good governance and human security assistance. Japan's activity made it one of the major players in Afghanistan, recognized by the international community including NATO, G7, SCO, and the Afghanistan government.

Japan's reconstruction assistance set new patterns of cooperation with NATO which did not involve military operations. While Japan's strength has been in funding and experience in development assistance, cooperation with the PRTs has allowed Japan to expand its development assistance geography beyond areas where the embassy or JICA already has a presence. Cooperation with PRTs as well as Japan's involvement in building road infrastructure along the distribution networks was praised by NATO and constituted steps towards building closer ties with the organization. Although Japan did not contribute troops to ISAF, it has become one of NATO's important ‘partners around the globe’ and this later brought their relations to a new level.

As far as political assistance is concerned Japan's participation in the drafting of the Afghan constitution, and assistance in holding presidential and parliamentary elections made it a reliable partner and a role model as a nonwestern state which underwent democratic reforms after World War II and was eager to introduce its development model to other nonwestern states. As a token of Afghanistan's gratitude

for Japan's role, Hamid Karzai said that Japan had priority rights to access Afghanistan's mineral resources and invited the Japanese to take part in lithium mining (“Karzai: Japan gets priority in Afghan mining”, 2010). However, Japanese companies have been reluctant to invest in Afghanistan, in contrast to China which has demonstrated a more active approach towards Afghanistan’s mineral resources. Although Japan is looking for ways to diversify the supply of rare metals and other resources, in the near perspective Afghanistan is not seen as a potential supplier.

Japan’s participation in the post-conflict settlement in Afghanistan had a great influence on Japan's conceptualization of assistance. Afghanistan has become a showcase of the realisation of the concept of “consolidation of peace” which became one of the basic concepts of the revised ODA charter in 2003. It also contributed to the development of the concept of “human security” which Japan embraced in the late 1990s and has made one of the pillars of its ODA in the 2000s. Prime Minister Koizumi, emphasized the connection between Japan's role in Afghanistan and its desire to implement a human security policy, which is an important element of Japan's foreign policy. In December 2001, speaking at a symposium on human security, he stated: "To eradicate terrorism, it is necessary to fight not only terrorism itself but also various other threats to individuals. This means that we should develop and maintain a society where individual people can fully realize their potential. This is the focus of "human security," and this is what Japan's foreign policy attaches importance to” (Prime Minister of Japan, 2001).

From 2001 to 2021, Japan allocated \$6.9 billion of official development assistance to Afghanistan, becoming one of the major donors of this country. Most of its ODA was grant assistance directed to human security projects such as healthcare, rural development, and education. This helped create an amicable image of Japan among the people of Afghanistan and can be called a manifestation of its soft power. Some analysts see Japan as a kind of role model, saying that the Afghanistan government can learn from Japan's postwar experience and focus its attention and limited resources on development while being relieved of responsibility for security. In this sense, Japan's role as a leader in the reconstruction of Afghanistan 'symbolizes strength in 'soft power' building (Heng, 2010).

Japan’s cooperation initiatives towards Central Asia since the launch of the antiterror campaign have been in line with the US vision of the region. Efforts at engaging Afghanistan in economic cooperation with the Central Asian states by creating infrastructure, and assisting cooperation among the Central Asian states reflect both Japan’s desire to unblock the resource-rich Central Asia and stabilise Afghanistan. However, the lack of intraregional cooperation together with political and economic risks explain Japan's relatively low economic presence in Central Asia, the absence of investment in Afghanistan and hamper the realization of broad economic projects in this region.

## **DISCUSSION**

The current situation in Afghanistan calls into question the results of the previous Japanese assistance: has it been instrumental in achieving Japan's foreign policy goals? The analysis of its activities and Tokyo’s multiple roles shows that Japan’s mission in

Afghanistan helped Japan avoid abandonment by its ally, get US support for its diplomatic initiatives and maintain security in East Asia and thus achieved its main foreign policy objective to strengthen the US-Japan alliance.

As far as Japan's economic interests in Afghanistan and the neighbouring countries are concerned, Tokyo's increased political role did not visibly contribute to its promotion. Political instability and lack of clear economic benefits make any investment projects in Afghanistan unlikely, and its role as a transit route does not attract Japanese business circles. Any economic projects can only be seen as a matter from a distant perspective and will depend on the developments in and around Afghanistan, which makes economic interests mostly secondary in Japan's strategy towards Afghanistan.

Japan's assistance to Afghanistan can be called successful in realizing the foreign policy objectives of increasing Japan's international contribution to peace and security, especially non-military security. Japan's role in Afghanistan has paved the way for cooperation with new partners and benefitted its reputation as a provider of human security and development assistance. Thus it can be concluded that the political goals of Japan's involvement in Afghanistan have been mostly achieved and its presence to makes it an indispensable player in the region, while the realisation of Japan's economic interests is a matter of long-term perspective and today it is not a priority factor in Japan's strategy towards Afghanistan.

Japan has been able to increase its political presence in Afghanistan. Although the relations with the Karzai administration can be called the closest ones, the history of Japan's interaction with the Taliban both in the 1990s and after 2001 has built a basis which can help Tokyo establish an effective dialogue with Kabul in the current situation. Japan's presence in Afghanistan has been mostly non-military and its efforts at helping the community create a positive image both in Afghanistan and in the Middle East. This characteristic combined with Japan's reputation as the economic superpower might give Japan leverage in negotiating with the Taliban and maintaining its role in the region even after the US's dramatic withdrawal. Japan's dual position as one of the G 7 countries which proclaims the Western values of democracy and market economy, and at the same time an Asian country known for its economic development-oriented approach (democracy through development) and less tough stance on the human right (in comparison to the Western countries) might be beneficial in recalibrating its strategy in Afghanistan.



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