

Aspects of Japan's Foreign Policy towards the Middle East

Historically Japan has a nearly existential rely on stability in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. It still relies on oil and gas from the Middle East to meet at least 90 percent of its energy needs, with the domestic intention for alternative energy resources damaged by the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Japan's priorities in this region include:

- Enhancing shared prosperity through fair and reciprocal trade and private sector investment in the Indo-Pacific.
- Cooperation with regional partners in areas such as energy, infrastructure, and the digital economy.
- Promoting governance and civil society in areas that include preventing corruption; securing nations' autonomy from foreign coercion; promoting transparency, and the rule of law; and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- Ensuring a peaceful and secure regional order that safeguards navigational rights and freedom in the Arab countries; confronts common threats; protects shared resources; and upholds sovereignty.

As for the Gulf states, the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” FIOP¹ recognized the pivotal and important role played by the Gulf Cooperation Council² countries at the regional and global levels.

On the economic-industrial level, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency's (JICA)³ development of the Jericho Agricultural Industrial Park (JAIP)

¹ **FOIP** is the most important feature of Japan's foreign policy under the Abe Administration. One of the most important questions is whether this vision aims to contain a rapidly rising China. Along with the amelioration of the relationship between Japan and China, this diplomatic strategy has been evolved from the quadrilateral security cooperation among leading democracies in this region, namely the US, Japan, Australia, and India, to a more comprehensive regional cooperation.

Priority Policy for Development Cooperation FY 2017 – Basic Concepts (Retrieved June 22, 2020)

<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000259285.pdf>

² **Gulf Cooperation Council**: is a regional intergovernmental political and economic union consisting of all Arab states of the Arabian Gulf except Iraq, namely: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The Charter of the GCC was signed on 25 May 1981, formally establishing the institution.

The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (Retrieved June 10, 2020)

<https://www.gcc-sg.org/en-us/Pages/default.aspx>

³ **Japan International Cooperation Agency** is a governmental agency that coordinates Official Development Assistance for the government of Japan. It is chartered with assisting economic and social growth in developing countries, and the promotion of international cooperation.

in the Jordan Valley is a key part of Japan's policy of proactive contributions to the Middle East peace⁴. A combination of both economic and diplomatic efforts, the Park is one way for Japan to balance its relationships and further its long-term strategic footprint in the region. Tokyo announced that its first goal was to promote "made in JAIP"⁵ as the ensure quality trademark⁶ in "gulf countries, the Arab region, the Western countries and other parts of the globe". At the gulf stage, the economic cooperation with KSA⁷ was strengthened after King Salman visit to Tokyo in 2017⁸.

At the diplomatic - political front, Japanese foreign minister Taro Kono stated at the "First Arab-Japanese Dialogue Forum"⁹ that "the Middle East is a key partner to Japan for the success of the "Indo-Pacific, Free and Open Strategy", which seeks to link the prosperity of development in the Indian and Pacific Oceans with the Middle East and Africa"¹⁰.

The Middle East, a vital region of the world with its diverse population and rich natural wealth, is the home to more than 500 million people, with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of more than four trillion dollars. It is the source of energy resources that supplies Japanese industries, through sea lanes and air routes. Obviously, Tokyo's interest in this vital region of the world is not limited to the

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) (Retrieved June 20, 2020)

<https://www.jica.go.jp/english/about/index.html>

⁴ **Japan provides new contribution to the Jericho Agro Industrial Park incentives programme implemented by the EU** (Retrieved March 22, 2020)

https://eeas.europa.eu/regions/middle-east-north-africa-mena/48873/japan-provides-new-contribution-jericho-agro-industrial-park-incentives-programme-implemented_en

⁵ **Made in JAIP**

The Jericho Industrial Agricultural Zone (JIAP) is a pilot project for a Japanese initiative through financial, technical, and human resources to enrich the fertile soil of Jericho, amounting to about \$100 million, including the construction of agriculture-related infrastructure.

Jericho Agro-Industrial Park (JAIP)

Foreign Minister Kono Visits JAIP (Retrieved March 22, 2020)

https://www.mofa.go.jp/me_a/me1/palestine/page4e_000740.html

⁶ **Speech by Foreign Minister Kono at the first-ever Japan-Arab Political dialogue** (Retrieved June 22, 2020)

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000288921.pdf>

⁷ **Memorandum of Cooperation for the 4th industrial Revolution between the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan and the King Abdelaziz City for Science and Technology of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

(Retrieved June 22, 2020)

<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000236216.pdf>

⁸ **Japan-Saudi Arabia Summit Meeting** (Retrieved June 11, 2020)

https://www.mofa.go.jp/me_a/me2/sa/page4e_000589.html

⁹ **The First Japan-Arab Political Dialogue** (Retrieved February 22, 2020)

https://www.mofa.go.jp/me_a/me1/page3e_000732.html

¹⁰ **Speech by Foreign Minister Taro Kono at the first - ever Japan – Arab Political dialogue** (Retrieved June 20, 2020) <http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000288921.pdf>

economic aspect, but also the political and social aspects directly linked to Japan's national security.

Japan imports about 90 percent of its crude oil from the Middle East, and 1,700 Japanese ships cross¹¹ the Strait of Hormuz in 2018, and "due to growing tensions in the region," "it was necessary to strengthen the information-gathering system to ensure the safety of the Japanese ships," the chief cabinet secretary announced.

The deployment will include one naval destroyer, equipped with helicopters, and at least one P-3C patrol aircraft currently involved in anti-piracy operations near Somalia. Also Japanese Defense Ministry official said¹² the government aims to start operating patrol aircraft sometime in January, while the destroyer is likely to begin its activities in the region in February.

In terms of tasks, Japan's deployment will be limited to intelligence gathering, which "directly affects the security of ships sailing" in the region, intending to ensure the "security" of the Japanese merchant ships and help to maintain "peace and stability."

In terms of deployment, the mission, which is scheduled to last for one year, will be limited to the Northern Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Oman and the Gulf of Aden, while the Maritime Self-Defense Force will not patrol vital shipping lanes passing through the Strait of Hormuz.

In light of these outlines, The Japanese government will examine¹³ whether it can use its currently deployed military assets to combat piracy in the region, or whether new assets need to be deployed to meet future needs.

FIOP is a dynamic approach combining two continents and oceans; in another term, uniting the fast-growing Asia and Africa that have huge potential while recognizing the importance of the Arabian Gulf, with its youth population, natural resources, and strategic location¹⁴.

¹¹ **Japan steps up for Middle East security** (Retrieved June 11, 2020)

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2019/10/25/editorials/japan-steps-middle-east-security/#.XuTfHedRXIU>

¹² Reuters, **رئيس وزراء اليابان متمسك بخطة نشر قوات في الشرق الأوسط** (Retrieved July 15, 2020)

<https://ara.reuters.com/article/topNews/idARAKBN1Z50HT>

¹³ **Japan steps up for Middle East security** (Retrieved June 22, 2020)

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2019/10/25/editorials/japan-steps-middle-east-security/#.XuTfiudRXIU>

¹⁴ **Japan-Saudi Arabia Relations (Basic Data)** (Retrieved June 27, 2020)

https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle_e/saudi/data.html

The Arab -Japanese rapprochement was reflected in the Manama summit¹⁵, where the Japanese foreign minister Taro Kono tackled the following questions¹⁶:

1. Why should Japan take care of Middle East issues?
2. Can Japan contribute effectively in solving the Middle East's complex problems?
3. Why is Japan making all these strenuous efforts for the Middle East?

"There are some things, only Japan can do"¹⁷ is Japan's confidence in the Gulf states and other Arab countries. To confirm this confidence, the Five Kono Principles¹⁸ were put forward in many approaches:

1- Contributing at the cultural, humanitarian, and academic level: The sincerity of Japan's interest in this kind of cooperation and support is that 12,000 members of the Japan Organization for International Cooperation (Jica) and 3,500 members of the Japan Overseas Volunteers Organization have worked and collaborated with citizens in the Arabian Gulf and the Middle East for the welfare of the local communities.

Intellectual cooperation between Japanese government agencies and their Arab counterparts and Arab intellectuals enriches the civilized cultural dialogue between the two civilizations, where ideas should be exchanged, talents would be discovered and developed.

¹⁵ IISS Manama Dialogue 2017 (Retrieved June 22, 2020)

<https://www.iiss.org/events/manama-dialogue/manama-dialogue-2017>

¹⁶ Speech by Foreign Minister Taro Kono, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan at the IISS Manama Dialogue (Retrieved June 22, 2020)

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000315610.pdf>

¹⁷ Japan to invest heavily in security and stability in the Middle East (Retrieved March 22, 2020)

<https://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/japan-to-invest-heavily-in-security-and-stability-in-the-middle-east-1.683839>

¹⁸ Five Kono Principles:

- A- The Construction of a Multi-Layered Relationship with the Countries of the Middle East.
- B- Extremism Countermeasures.
- C- Intellectual and Human Contributions.
- D- Sustained Efforts.
- E- The Reinforcement of Political Initiatives.

Lecture by Foreign Minister Kono, hosted by the Yomiuri Shimbun Company and the Middle East Institute of Japan (Retrieved February 20, 2020)

<https://www.meij.or.jp/content/files/event/R18-2.pdf>

2- Investing in human beings: Human resource development is the key to the economic, social, and political prosperity of society. The Japanese historical experience concludes and asserts that education is the basis for the modernization and development of society. Supporting the education sector in the Arab world will benefit Arab societies by increasing awareness and knowledge of the other civilizations, especially the Far East heritage. By supporting higher education and investing in minds will open the prospects for the future for Arab youth and benefit all segments of society.

3- The continuity of the Japanese effort: The "slow but steady steps" tactic is the focus of Japan's rapprochement with the Arab world. Japan is building its long-term relations with Arab governments and peoples intending to increase confidence in dealing with the eastern civilizations.

By contributing to the peace process. Japan seeks to bring the political views of the various parties in the Middle East closer together, and international stability and prosperity depend on the peace process in this vital region of the world. Japan has always tended to adopt a cautious approach focused on energy security, adhering to three key principles: caution, neutrality, and avoidance of military engagement, even in rare cases where Japan has shown signs of a more active foreign policy in the Middle East.

To strengthen its relations with the Arab world, Japan has put forward the following initiatives:

1.- The "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" initiative¹⁹ aims mainly to support the Palestinian national economy and create jobs for citizens in the occupied territories. Japan is also seeking to increase its exports of Palestinian agricultural products by support Palestinian farms²⁰.

Ending the Arab-Israeli conflict and bringing peace to the Middle East is an international demand that has positive repercussions on the world stage, and of course, Japan will be a beneficiary of the desired state of stability.

¹⁹ **Japan's Concept for Creating the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity** (Retrieved March 22, 2020)
https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle_e/palestine/concept0607.html

²⁰ **Corridor for Peace & Prosperity** (Retrieved June 19, 2020)
https://www.ps.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/peace.html

2. Contribute to solving the refugee crisis in the region²¹: Japan's belief in the return of stability to the Middle East²² prompts it to help alleviate the pain of displaced people in conflict zones. It has provided \$25 million in assistance to Syrian refugee camps in Jordan and has opened the way for some families of graduate students to complete their majors in Japanese universities and institutes²³.

3- Participation in peacekeeping operations²⁴: Japan's timid start was through the participation of the medical brigade in the Self-Defense Forces in the reconstruction of Iraq²⁵, it was stationed in the city of Samawah²⁶, numbered 600 personnel²⁷.

As for participation in armed units, it was through the United Nations forces in southern Sudan²⁸, which soon the Japanese Ministry of Defense returned and withdrew²⁹. Japan is ready to send military observers in the event of a comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian issue as part of its endeavor to bring world peace.

Japan already sent military observers in the event of a comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian issue in its quest for world peace. Japan has also sought to play a larger role in regional peace and security. Through more robust diplomatic, humanitarian, and military footprints, Prime Minister Abe has been determined to advance Japan's strategic interests to provide for its national defense, increase its global footprint and diversify its energy and trade portfolios. This includes the

²¹ **Human Rights, Humanitarian Assistance, Refugees** (Retrieved June 12, 2020)

<https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/refugee/index.html>

²² **Japan's Commitment toward Stability in the Middle East** (Retrieved July 11, 2020)

<http://www.us.emb-japan.go.jp/files/000110964.pdf>

²³ **Resumption of activities at the UNHCR Reception Centers** (Retrieved June 16, 2020)

https://www.refugees-lebanon.org/uploads/poster/poster_148232280137.pdf

²⁴ **Japan's Contribution to UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKO)** (Retrieved June 22, 2020)

<https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/un/pko/pdfs/contribution.pdf>

²⁵ Reconstruction and Support Group *Jietai Iraku Fukkou Shiengun*.

IRAQ and PEACE IN THE WORLD (Retrieved February 22, 2020)

https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl151_iraq_full_report.pdf

²⁶ **Grassroots Human Security Grant Aid to Samawah, Iraq** (Retrieved July 22, 2020)

<https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2005/12/1201-2.html>

²⁷ **Defense of Japan - White Paper** (Retrieved June 22, 2020)

<https://web.archive.org/web/20070307205509/http://www.mod.go.jp/j/iraq/iraq/index.htm>

²⁸ Daisuke Akimoto, **Japan's international peace operations in South Sudan** (Retrieved February 22, 2020)

<http://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/japans-international-peace-operations-south-sudan/>

²⁹ **Japan-South Sudan Relations** (Retrieved March 11, 2020)

https://www.mofa.go.jp/af/af1/s_sudan/page22e_000317.html

recent \$50 billion Japan-EU economic partnership agreement and Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy to counter China's Belt and Road initiative³⁰.

Also, since 2011, the Self-Defense Forces base in Djibouti has been used for counter-piracy missions and strategic military partnership with the U.S. in the Horn of Africa.

Hence the answer to the questions if that Japan cares about the Middle East region for its global strategic importance, and yes, Japan's contribution to the peace, construction and development process can make a difference, and Japan is making all these strenuous efforts because it believes in the importance of spreading peace in the world and achieving economic wealth for the purpose of human prosperity.

Japan Middle East outreach dovetails with FOIP strategy and Tokyo's example of rules-based cooperation, an alternative to a China-led order. Tokyo has also not ignored Russia's and China's growing regional power while the decline of the U.S. in the past decade. Japan has obvious political and material limitations when it comes to having outsized leverage on regional outcomes, but the region is ripe for solutions from credible actors such as the European Union and Japan to fill a void increasingly left open by the U.S.

In conclusion, the study and analysis of the "Indian-Pacific, Free and Open Zone Strategy" need to be compared to China's Silk Road Belt strategy³¹, which emphasizes its continental and global effectiveness, including the opening of strategic partnership lines with the Arab Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, without missing the historical relations of the People's Republic of China with the Arab left countries since the time of the Cold War.

So, the central question beyond this study is whether the "Japanese soft power" approach can counter the strategies of offensive adversaries? These competitors who have a strong capital financial surplus, have an ambition for global leadership, protected by political ferocity, and media diplomatic effectiveness in defending what they consider their national interests.

³⁰ Axel Berkofsky, **Geopolitics by Other Means: The Indo-Pacific Reality**, Milano: Ledizioni LediPublishing, 2019.

³¹ **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** (Retrieved June 12, 2020)
https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/info/iList.jsp?cat_id=10059

Japan self-restraints surrounding the mission are designed to avoid giving the impression that The Japan Self-Defense Forces *Jieitai*³² is the ally of the United States in the region³³.

Tokyo is under pressure from the U.S. president to play a more active role in protecting its interests in the Middle East. The US conservative admiration complained that Japan was not paying for U.S. patrols protecting shipping lanes in the region, and even called on Tokyo to cover more of the costs of deploying U.S. troops to Japan. On the other hand, Japan is keen to maintain good relations with Iran, and Tokyo seeks to be a potential mediator between Tehran and Washington.

For this, the Cabinet Office confirmed that The Japanese mission would be independent of the deployments of any other country in the region, although the chief cabinet secretary made it clear at a press conference that intelligence gathering could take place "in coordination with the countries concerned."

Although the Japanese government has described the operation as an "investigation and research" mission, and the Cabinet Office's assertion that the participating forces are not authorized to use weapons to protect other ships from attack, an exception opens the door to other tasks: if it's in need. Also, the mission could be transformed into a "naval police operation," as a designation that allows the destroyer and aircraft to defend other ships.

FIOP success has a great chance of building friendship bridges between Japan and the Arab world. The cooperation between the two Eastern civilizations should not only be at the economical phase but also there are political, academic and cultural aspects that will empower the relations and open new aspects of friendly bonds between the two people for the sake of peace and prosperity for humanity.

³² Ministry of Defense (Retrieved June 22, 2020)

<https://www.mod.go.jp/e/>

³³ Ben Dooley, **Japan to Deploy Destroyer to Middle East** (Retrieved June 12, 2020)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/26/world/asia/japan-iran-military-patrol.html?emc=rss&partner=rss>