Japan and its Relations with the Middle East and Africa: From Dependency to Philanthropy

I. Introduction

Japanese foreign policy has many agendas, and its relations with the Middle East and Africa have traditionally been of a minimal priority. Nevertheless, relations have been getting much closer over time, as a product of globalization and necessity. In the two regions of the Middle East and Africa, Japan has two entirely different situations.

Japan has become increasingly dependent on oil exportation from the Middle East, and so foreign policy is very generous toward Arab nations. Japan also favors the Middle East peace process and many other programs designed to stabilize the region. As a result of all of this, Japanese foreign policy toward the Middle East is designed to appease Arab nations while a minor attempt is made to try and make the area safer.

Japan and Africa share a very different relationship, as Japan has much more control in the situation. Traditionally, there has not been much activity between Japan and Africa. Lately however, Japan has been donating a lot of money to this continent, in the hope that it will become safer and also a better trade partner. While there is some belief that Japan is trying to mold the region into a "younger" Asia, the cumulative effect of Japan's assistance to date has been seen in the form of mild economic improvement in various parts of Africa.

II. Relations between Japan and the Middle East

A. History

Japan and the Middle East have traditionally had little contact with each other, and

official relations did not really begin until the 20th century. Although there is some evidence that Japan and the Middle East traded along the "Silk Road" in the 8th century, both sides remained isolated from each other. However, Japan's victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) and their effective government soon made them the envy of many Middle Eastern nations. Many historians believe that Japan's rise partly caused the revolutions in Persia (Iran) in 1906, and in Turkey in 1908¹.

Relations gradually improved, but this Progress was halted in 1973 with the first OPEC (Oil and Petroleum Exporting Countries) crisis. Following two oil embargoes on Japan (and many other western countries) Japan quickly relieved just how important relations with the Middle East were. Middle Eastern relations have now assumed a top priority in Japanese foreign affairs and Japan now has 20 embassies in Middle Eastern countries².

B. Key Issues

1.Oil transportation and Sea Lanes

Oil transportation through oceanic travel has become a very important issue to the Japanese, as they are trying to protect vital sea lanes around Southeast Asia. These sea lanes are very important to the Japanese whether they are threatened environmentally³ or militarily. Because of southern expansion, the SDF (Self Defense Force) was originally strengthened in 1981, and the time has come for more expansion. This is because of the "Suzuki Sea-Lane Doctrine" in which sea routes (as opposed to merely Japan's coastal waters) are to be protected, there-by broadening the amount of ocean to be protected⁴.

Japan will need a far more advanced and aggressive navy, and they may have to abandon their "free ride" protection from the US in order to accomplish this. Therefore a great debate has ensued weighing the stakes of greater burden sharing, lower US defense troop levels, and increased military budget against the threat of unsafe sea travel⁵. Though it is yet to be fully resolved, Japan will more than likely end up with a greatly increased military in the future.

2.Middle East Peace Process

The Middle East Peace Process is an immediate concern for the Japanese, as they rely on the region for so much of their crude oil. Traditionally, Japan has purchased approximately 80% of its oil to the Middle East⁶, and regional conflict there could disturb Japan's energy capacity. Essentially, Japan hopes to pay off anti-Israeli nations such that peace is maintained and oil is delivered. Japan has also put a lot of time into negotiations, and this includes regular visits of either Japan's foreign minister or prime minister to Arab nations. On January 1996, Japan took the process a step further by dispatching several SDF units to the Golan Heights in Syria. The role of the Japanese forces is to provide transportation for UN forces and also secondary military support. Later in 1996, Japan sent a 77-person observation team to preside over Palestine's elections⁷. Although their activity has not led to peace in the region, Japan still continues to donate aid to Palestine and make other efforts in the hope of eventual peace.

3. Economic Cooperation

Since 1995, Japan has been the third largest donor to the Middle East, next to the US and France. Because of oil pressures, Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) to the Middle East has been steadily rising. In 1972, ODA to the Middle East

represented 0.8% of Japan's overall budget. By 1977, it had increased substantially to 24.5%, and remains in that region today. Aid surged in 1990, as the Gulf War crisis as Japan sent \$2 billion in aid to Egypt, Jordan and Turkey, as well as \$500 million to Syria⁸.

ODA has traditionally been given based on a country's economic needs, and so Japan groups Middle Eastern countries into categories to see who is most needy. Among the neediest countries are Afghanistan, Yemen, and Egypt, while the United Arab Emirates, Israel, Qatar, and Kuwait are the richest. The richest countries receive very little aid(if any), but they receive much technological assistance from Japan. The poorer countries usually receive aid in the form of loans and grants⁹. ODA has been a valuable way for Japan to improve its diplomatic relations with some countries, and it will be a factor in Japanese foreign policy for many years to come.

C. Significant Bi-Lateral Relations

1.Iraq

Japan has been very concerned with events in Iraq, and it has taken many steps to try and global tension with Iraq. Because it relies on the Middle East for oil, Japan has been hesitant to take aggressive steps against Iraq. During the Gulf War, Japan initially failed to send troops to support coalition forces because of protests in the government and among the Japanese population. By 1992, Japan created the PKO (Peace Keeping Organization) to be sent to the Persian Gulf, but it made clear that the force was to stay out of military action. In an attempt to compensate for their lack of military action, Japan contributed a large sum of \$13 billion to the war effort¹⁰. In defense of Japan, a small argument can be made that Japan was merely following the "routine" of its non-offensive army, which was not meant to battle Iraq¹¹. However, the Gulf War situation is best looked at as an example of Japan wanting to appease its western allies but not anger its Middle East oil partners. Strangely enough, a similar relationship still exists today.

Currently, Japan agrees with the UN in that Iraq should not be able to possess weapons of mass destruction, and they have consistently urged Iraq to allow the UNSCOM (UN Special Commission) officials to view Iraqi weapons areas. In 1998, Japan had five meetings on the subject, and they have supported all UN actions, although they have urged for peace instead of air strikes on Iraqi targets¹².

Japan has also been sending aid to Iraq, in an effort to still maintain decent relations with them. On February 26 1999, Japan donated \$1.5 million dollars in the form of emergency aid to humanitarian groups aiding the Iraqi people¹³. With the donation, Japan made yet another plea for Iraq to comply with UN resolutions so that the UN sanctions could be lifted.

2.Israel

Japan and Israel have fair relations, but the possibility of close and sincere relations is prevented by Japan's strong support of Palestine. Japan and Israel have had some successful bilateral agreements, such as a 1993 convention on taxes and a 1995 meeting on cooperation in science and technology. In September 1995, Japan granted a \$100 million loan to Israel and a Japanese bank promptly granted Israel's state telecommunications company a \$150 million loan¹⁴. Trade between the two nations is healthy too, as in 1996 Japan exported \$1.1 billion to Israel and imported \$1.2 billion

from Israel. Politically, relations seem cordial as both Yitzhak Rabin and Benjamin Netanyahu have visited Japan during their respective presidencies¹⁵.

Unfortunately, relations between the two nations are not as good as they seem. This is due to Japan's support of Israel's Middle Eastern enemies. Japan donates large amounts of aid to Palestine, as well as ample amounts of aid to nearly every other Middle Eastern country except Israel. This list includes Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan, and most are enemies of Israel¹⁶. Adding to tensions was Japan's refusal to send military personnel to the Gulf War, an act that made Japan's stance on Israel's well being appear indifferent at best. It is important to note however that the two nations are very active trade partners, and this counters some tensions. Although Japan is very active in the peace process, many Israelis and westerners still feel that Japan is on Palestine's side.

3.Palestine

Palestine has grown very close to Japan because of the amounts of aid that Japan has been giving to it. In September 1993, Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa announced the "Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements" between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. This marked the beginning of a giant ongoing aid package to be given to Palestine. \$2 million was donated in September, and \$200 million had been pledged to Palestine by the end of the year¹⁷. As of 1998, \$352 million had been given to Palestine, and this aid has come either directly through Japan or through international organizations¹⁸.

Japan has aided Palestine in many ways since 1993. Aid has helped with hygiene, medicine, and housing, and other such programs. Japan has begun a series of programs designed to generate employment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in response to Israel's economic closure in March 1996. Japan provides technical training for Palestinians in fields such as the environment, and enrollment in these programs has steadily increased since 1993¹⁹.

4.Egypt

Japan and Egypt have had a long history of cordial relations, dating back to 1922, when Japan first recognized Egyptian independence. In 1983, Egyptian President Muhammad Hosni Mubarek paid a landmark visit to Japan that would result in increased economic, political, and cultural exchange between the two nations, In recent years, Japan has grown closer to Egypt for a variety of reasons. The first of these is Egypt's role in the Middle East peace process. The two nations both want peace in the Middle East, and they have begun to coordinate their efforts. Egypt recently hosted a series of meetings and workshops featuring international Middle East peace groups headed by Japanese officials²⁰.

Economics have brought Japan closer to Egypt in several ways. First, Egyptian money is very important to Japan because of the trade surplus that Japan runs with Egypt (\$715 million in 1995) and there is much Egyptian direct investment in Japan (\$80 million as of 1994). Egypt is also striving to become a market economy, and this benefits Japan as well. Finally, Egypt is in a desperate need for aid due to its rapidly growing population, high poverty rate, and shifting economy. Japan has aided in Egyptian agricultural productivity, human resource development, health improvement, and technological refinement²¹.

The only recent threat to the relationship was the Luxor tourist massacre of November 1997, in which many tourists (including several Japanese) were killed by Egyptian terrorists. However, the Egyptian government expressed its sadness at the matter, and Japan was satisfied by its efforts regarding the capture of the terrorists. On the one-year anniversary of the incident, the Japanese government released a statement asking the Egyptian government to make sure that an event like that does not occur again²².

5.Turkey

Japan has been trying to maintain good relations with Turkey for several reasons. First, Turkey is an important country because of the close diplomatic ties that it has with both Western and Eastern European nations. Second, Turkey has traditionally been a good ally to Japan and is need of aid due to its large population. Third, Japan runs a healthy trade surplus with Turkey, amounting to \$1.878 billion in 1997. Finally, Turkey is located at the crossroads of Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, which is a very strategic point²³.

Because of this, Japan extends much aid and economic assistance to Turkey. Japan has given significant amounts of loans and grants to Turkey, and there has been much cultural exchange made between the two nations. There have been Japanese exhibitions and cultural centers established in Turkey, and the Japanese language is now taught extensively throughout Turkey. As an example of their good relations, Turkish airliners rescued 215 Japanese citizens in 1985 that were trapped in Iran and Iraq at the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war²⁴.

6.Saudi Arabia

Japan began diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia in 1954 and economics have forced the two nations closer over the years. Saudi Arabia is the second greatest supplier of crude oil to Japan, and Saudi Arabia imports much in the field of machinery and automobiles from Japan. In 1995, Japan imported \$9.175 billion worth of products from Saudi Arabia, while Saudi Arabian imports from Japan numbered \$2.702 billion. In 1995, Japan imported 371 million barrels of oil from Saudi Arabia, which represented 22% of Japan's overall crude oil imports. Since Saudi Arabia is a prosperous country, Japan does not extend financial aid but rather technological assistance to Saudi Arabia²⁵. All of this economic activity has strengthened the ties between the two nations.

In the 1990s, diplomatic relations have seen some significant improvement. In November 1994, Japanese dignitaries Crown Prince Naruhito and Crown Princess Masako visited Saudi Arabia. Subsequent meetings have strengthened relations, and much progress was made following Prince Abdullah's visit to Japan in October of 1998. Meeting with Prime Minister Obuchi, the two sides signed the Joint Statement Concerning Cooperation, discussed further areas of cooperation, and discussed the importance of regional stability²⁶.

7.Afghanistan

Japan has taken a very active stance concerning Afghanistan affairs ever since the Afghan Civil War of 1979. In the past twenty years following the civil war, the Japanese government has extended over \$400 million to Afghanistan. Events in the past year have forced Japan to become even more economically generous, as the Afghan government is crumbling following the rise of the Shiite Taliban faction. In the spring of 1998, Japan

helped coordinate a project with several UN agencies that would return foreign refugees from eastern Afghanistan, known as the Azra and Tizin project. Japan also made modest donations of \$3.5 million to help Afghan refugees in other countries. Soon after that, Japan became involved in "Common-Programming", an effort to coordinate foreign aid to Afghanistan²⁷.

Japan is currently much more involved with Afghanistan's internal political affairs, as it hopes to put an end to political strife. Japan is an active participant in the ASG (Afghanistan Support Group) and has tried to resolve the conflict at the Groups semi-annual meetings. On January 22nd1999, two Taliban officials traveled to Japan and partook in an exchange of ideas with the Japanese government. On March 15 1999, Japan Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura issued a statement declaring that he was elated that the Taliban and anti-Taliban forces had agreed upon a coalition government, and that the Japanese government was very eager to help the situation in any way possible²⁸. Clearly then, Japan has a taken a very active stance in pursuing peace in Afghanistan.

8.Iran

Relations between Japan and Iran are improving significantly as the two nations share many mutual concerns. It is important to note that just a few years ago (1992), both nations were unable to successfully negotiate the development of offshore oil fields in the Hormuz area. In the Hormuz negotiations, the Japanese oil company Japex tried to back out of their \$1.6 billion deal when they realized that profits would be lower than anticipated, and neither government was able to remedy the situation²⁹. However, the two countries are beginning to identify more common ground and common problems, and this will hopefully lead to progress in their bilateral relations.

It was believed the two countries were growing too close together, as Japan gave Iran a \$400 million loan to build a dam on the Karun River. Following American protest, Japan made the loan conditional and pledged that it would be withdrawn if Iran engaged in any terrorist activity³⁰. Relations seem to be improving more so, as seen in a December 1998 visit from Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi. The two sides agreed on sanctions on Iraq, the Middle East Peace Process, regional stability, and economic concerns. At this meeting, a "Seminar on Iran-Japan Cooperation in the 21st Century" was proposed, and it is tentatively scheduled for late 1999³¹.

Iran welcomes Japan's support for the Palestinians, and this has helped ease economic transactions between the two countries. The results of this vary from oil agreements to Iran's investment seminar in Osaka in October of 1998. Japan and Iran have also begun a series of cultural exchanges, and the additive effect of the increase in bilateral relations should produce a closer relationship for the two countries in the near future³².

III. Relations between Japan and Africa

A. Key Issues

1.TICAD II

Japan's interests for African development are best evidenced in their Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) programs. The TICAD project is the culmination of Japanese aid and assistance to Africa, and thus its success is a central goal of Japanese-African relations. Although TICAD is a Japanese program, it is not funded exclusively by Japan as Asian countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia are becoming donors as well. TICAD-1 was held in 1993 and it helped lay the foundation for future African development. TICAD focuses on eventual African self-reliance, and TICAD-2 was held in October 1998 as a way to add to this process³³.

The purpose of TICAD-2 is "poverty reduction through accelerated economic growth and sustainable development, and effective integration of African economies into the global economy". As a way to measure the results, the TICAD-2 planners hope to reduce African poverty 50% by the year 2015. Also important to this is that economic growth is spread throughout the African population, which would produce a more equitable standard of living. TICAD-2 has chosen four areas connected to poverty in which to attack: education, health, economics, and government³⁴.

Since education is crucial for human advancement, it has taken on a high priority for the TICAD-2 planners. Many African nations have school participation rates below 50%, and female illiteracy rates in excess of 50%. By improving educational resources, educational quality, and adult skill development, TICAD hopes to solve much of the education crisis. The goals of TICAD-2 regarding education consist of universal primary school education by 2015 and a 50% reduction of adult illiteracy by 2005³⁵.

Health is a major problem in Africa, as infant mortality, AIDs rates, and hunger are the highest in the world. Although it is impossible to know exactly how much of the population has contracted AIDs, it is believed that 50-60% of the adult population is HIV positive³⁶. In his visit to Kenya, Anver Versi commented on an alarming an "ominous" absence of young men and women wherever he went, believing that AIDs was to blame³⁷. TICAD-2 has a number of programs designed to help general health, including family cleaning, drinking water improvement, and nutritional education. Through these programs, TICAD-2 aims to reduce maternal mortality by 50% in 2005, and again in 2015. They also hope to increase access to sanitized water, reduce infant mortality in half by 2015, and greatly reduce infectious diseases such as AIDs, malaria, tuberculosis, and polio³⁸.

Through strengthening Africa's economic sector, Japan hopes to assist the continent as well as increase global trade. Economic development is to take place in both the private sector (such as entrepreneurial expansion) and the public sector (such as industrial improvement). The goals of this are to be an improved domestic private sector and an increase in African productivity, especially concerning agricultural products³⁹.

Japan believes that improvement in the three previously mentioned sectors will lead to "good governance" throughout Africa. A stable Africa is Japan's top priority regarding TICAD-2, and Japan hopes that democracy will spread under their reforms and improvements. Goals in the government sector include a strengthening to constitutional legitimacy of democratic institutions, greater success in human rights, and a universal cultural tolerance in Africa (cultural differences have led to much bloodshed across the continent). So Japan hopes that the climax of TICAD-2 will be government improvement such that there is a decrease in African violence and a more stable and trade-friendly environment is created⁴⁰.

2.Motives for Aid

Japan is very generous in funding African development, and an important question is "Why?". It is obvious that Japan would benefit in both safety and economic success if Africa was strengthened, but Japan has another agenda as well. Basically, Japan wants aid recipients to follow the East Asian model of economic development and not that of the West. Japan sees Africa as more similar to Asia than to the West, and they (whether subconsciously or consciously) view Africa as a young and under-developed Asia. In order to produce a more advanced Africa, Japan sets up a series of guidelines concerning issues from aid use, to the environment to arms sales⁴¹.

Japan grants its aid in small portions to be used on "humble" projects such as village wells. This counters western aid, which focuses on large and ambitious infrastructure programs. Japan regularly encourages African countries to follow the Japanese model of government, and this includes government intervention and a lack of emphasis on arms⁴². However, many African governments disagree with Japan's ideas and they are more inclined to follow Western economic plans. As Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni told Tokyo in 1993 ""(Donors) should not interfere in Africa's general development because foreigners (have) interfered with Africa for the past 500 years and our present crisis has been caused mainly by outsiders"⁴³.

3. Japanese Anti-Black Sentiment, and its consequences

"Race" is a very serious issue in Japan today, as many Japanese view themselves as the "pure" race and look down upon other races. Although race is an important issue throughout the globe, "nowhere is it greater than in Japan". This has important consequences, as many Japanese look down upon dark colored races and this attitude impedes bicultural development⁴⁴. It was not until the occupation period (1945-52) that the Japanese people had any real contact with blacks, and they had traditionally viewed them as strange and inferior. As time went by, the Japanese have gradually grown more accustomed to blacks. However, there is some proof that a majority of Japanese opposed the civil rights movement in the US, sympathizing conversely with the majority American whites who were trying to limit power in the US to white citizens⁴⁵. Thus, although this situation is improving, many Japanese still look down on blacks and this somewhat hampers the improvement of relations with Africa.

C. Significant Bi-Lateral relations

1.South Africa

Although Japan and South Africa have not had traditionally good relations, the end of apartheid in South Africa has ushered in a new era of significantly improved relations. For nearly 50 years, Japan had imposed limitations on economic and personal contact with South Africa. However, Japan still managed to hold many official and unofficial contacts with South Africa, and this is something that they are not very proud of⁴⁶. South Africa began to disassemble their apartheid policies in February of 1990, and Nelson Mandela (then president of the African National Congress) made an historic visit to Japan eight months later. Japan began to lift restrictions on activities with South Africa in June of 1991, and official diplomatic relations between the two nations were reestablished in January of 1992⁴⁷.

Following Democratic elections in April 1994, Japan decided to issue South Africa an aid package of \$1.3 billion, and economic activity began to increase. Later that year, an annual Japanese cultural week was organized in South Africa, marking the beginning of cultural exchange. As South African President, Nelson Mandela again visited Japan in 1995, and by the next year the Japan was importing nearly \$3 billion worth of goods from South Africa⁴⁸. South African imports from Japan also began to rise, as imported Japanese machinery and automobiles totaled over \$2 billion in 1996. The most important event occurred in April 1998, when the two countries established the "Japan-South Africa Partnership Forum". This forum is "co-chaired by the ministers of both nations to serve as a mechanism for exchanges of views between the two governments, in order to expand cooperative relations between Japan and South Africa"⁴⁹.

2. Kenya

Kenya is Japan's "gate-way" to East Africa, as its overall size and strategic location make it very essential to Japanese relations with Africa. Thus, Japan has put a lot of money into Kenya, and has been Kenya's leading aid donor since 1986. Japan donates more to Kenya than any other country in Africa, and these projects include \$23 million in direct investment as well as development loans, grants, and technical assistance⁵⁰. Japan has also been active in cultural exchange with Kenya, as they have sponsored Kenyan Sumo and Judo competitions, journalism programs, and educational workshops⁵¹.

3. Other Recent Events in Bilateral Relations

Since late 1998, Japan has become directly involved with several African nations for various reasons. Japan has been most active in aiding the Republic Mozambique, which is still recovering from a bloody civil war that ended in 1992. On October 16 1998, Japan donated \$1 million to Mozambique to aid in landmine clearance. Many mines are still buried in Mozambique, and the \$1 million is part of an aid package from Japan that is designed to help the country recove⁵²r. On March 12 1999, Japan contributed an additional assistance package of nearly \$2 million to help Mozambique recover from massive floods that afflicted nearly 400,000 people⁵³.

Japan has also been active in assisting Angola, as they extended \$3.5 million in aid on October 16 1998 to international organizations that are helping victims of Angola's political violence. Because there are approximately 260,000 refugees and an additional 1,200,000 displaced persons from the fighting, \$1.4 million of the aid went to the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission on Refugees)⁵⁴. A final concern was the violence in Ethiopia and its former possession of Eritrea, as the two countries were involved in recent fighting. On March 1 1999, Japan issued a statement supporting the recent cease-fire in the region⁵⁵.

IV. Conclusion

Japan has very different relations with Africa and the Middle East. Japan acts like an older bother in many ways to Africa, and it aids their development much. Japan is a leading global donor to many African nations, and their aid may eventually produce a better world for Japan. In the Middle East, Japan can not afford to disperse funds on a long-term project. Instead, Japan is concerned with the very serious matter of oil exportation, and this dictates much of their foreign policy there. Japan is dependent on oil, and it is nearly "black-mailed" into paying for oil. So in Japan relations with the Middle East and Africa, a shift can be seen from dependency to philanthropy.

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End Notes

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