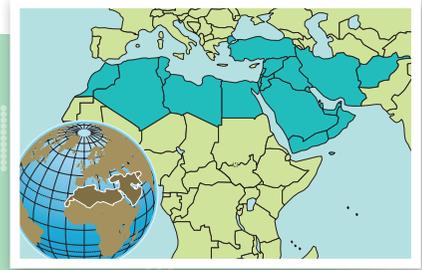


## Section 6

# The Middle East and North Africa



## Overview

The Middle East and North Africa region is situated in a geopolitically important location as the intersection of Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and South Asia. This region contains major international maritime routes for international commerce, and is also an important supplier of energy resources, including oil and natural gas, to the rest of the world. On the other hand, this area is facing a number of challenges that destabilize the region such as the expansion of violent extremists including Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the mass refugees that are flowing into nearby regions, the worsening situation in Syria and Iraq, the tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the issue of Middle East Peace, and the conditions in Afghanistan, Yemen, and Libya. Achieving peace and stability in this region is greatly important for the international community as a whole, including Japan. The global community is working on solutions to these issues. Japan has been working with the global community to be effective in areas such as humanitarian aid, stabilization assistance,

and mid-and long-term development support while playing a constructive role in relation to each country in the region to achieve regional stability.

Japan relies on the Middle East for more than 80% of its crude oil imports and has developed ties with the Middle East and North Africa region countries (hereafter referred to as the “Middle East countries”) that have previously been centered on resources and energy. This is no longer the extent of such relations as Japan builds a more multi-layered relationship including resources and energy, as well as wide-ranging economic cooperation, politics and security, and culture and people-to-people exchanges. Since the inauguration of the second administration in December 2012, Prime Minister Abe visited this region six times, and there have been a number of high-level visits, meetings, and talks. The Government of Japan has made efforts to strengthen ties with the region under the concept of the “never-failing running mate of Middle East countries<sup>1</sup>.”

The expansion of violent extremism including ISIL has been not only significantly undermining the order in the

<sup>1</sup> Speech by Prime Minister Abe “The Best Way is to Go in the Middle,” January 2015.  
URL: [http://www.mofa.go.jp/me\\_a/me1/eg/page24e\\_000067.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/me_a/me1/eg/page24e_000067.html)

Middle East and North Africa region but also raising a great concern to the entire global society. On various occasions such as the May 2016 G7 Ise-Shima Summit, Japan has expressed its intention to support the construction of inclusive societies that do not generate violent extremism. With the spirit of “the best way is in the middle,” the Government of Japan has provided humanitarian assistance for the refugees and internally displaced persons, the improvement of economic infrastructure, and the development of human resources. At the same time, Japan has resolutely criticized the despicable acts of terrorism caused by ISIL and other organizations and expressed support for the fight against terrorism in the international community.

The protracted crisis in Syria and the expansion of ISIL in Syria and Iraq have caused a massive number of internally displaced persons and an influx of refugees from both countries to neighboring countries and the European region.

Regarding the situation in Syria, Japan has repeatedly expressed at international conferences since 2015 that its contribution centers mainly on humanitarian assistance and political dialogue. In 2016, Japan also provided many assistance programs, including yen loans to Turkey and Jordan, which have been affected by the influx of refugees from Syria. The assistance that Japan has provided to Syria, Iraq and their neighboring countries exceeds 1.66 billion US dollars up until the end of 2016.

In relation to the Middle East Peace Process, Japan urged the resumption of peace talks on many occasions, including summit meetings held during Prime Minister Abe’s visit to Israel and Palestine in January 2015 and at a summit meeting

in Japan with President of Palestine Abbas in February 2016. Furthermore, Japan has made steady progress on its unique efforts to support Palestine, including the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative and the Conference on the Cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD).

January marked the “implementation day” of the final agreement on the Iranian nuclear issue, and the U.S. and the EU partially suspended or terminated sanctions against Iran. Following the final agreement, Japan will make efforts to further strengthen relations with Iran through such means as cooperation to encourage the steady implementation of the final agreement by Iran and the conclusion of the bilateral investment agreement.

In recent years, the Middle East countries have achieved steady economic development due to their rapidly growing youth population, and have been increasing their presence as a consumer market and an investment destination. Therefore, Japan has been working on establishing legal frameworks such as Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA), Free Trade Agreements (FTA), investment agreements, tax agreements, and social security agreements, which are foundations for strengthening the economic and business relationships with the Middle East countries. Additionally, Japan has been promoting infrastructure projects in the region. When Prime Minister Abe visited the Middle East region, he was accompanied by an economic delegation comprised of companies from various industries and business categories, from large to medium and small enterprises. This delegation actively pitched Japan’s strengths to the leaders and the business

communities of each country.

## 1 Iraq

In 2016, the Iraqi Security Forces made remarkable progress on liberating areas controlled by “The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).” The operation has been in progress since the second half of 2016 as indicated by the liberation of major cities in northern Iraq such as Ramadi (February), Heet (April), Rutba (May), and Fallujah (June). On 17 October, Prime Minister Abadi of Iraq declared starting operations to liberate Mosul, ISIL’s largest stronghold, and the Iraqi Security Forces have been continuing its mop-up operations.

Although the government maintains its centripetal force with military headway against ISIL, political conflicts and tensions are continuing such as Prime Minister Abadi’s incomplete cabinet restructure and the resignation of cabinet ministers due to corruption. In addition, there is still no notable progress on national reconciliation, which is one of the major issues in Iraq.

Due to the ongoing fight against terrorism in Iraq, more than three million internally displaced persons have emerged, and the need for humanitarian assistance remains extremely high. Against this backdrop, Japan decided to offer 100 million US dollars for humanitarian and stabilization assistance to Iraq in January which included the provision of food, water, and other daily necessities to refugees as well as repairing houses, and providing vocational training with the aim of assisting the return of refugees to their home and settlement.

On 20 July, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Yoji Muto attended the Pledging

### The complete map of Iraq



State Minister for Foreign Affairs Muto, attending the Pledging Conference in Support of Iraq (July 21, Washington DC, U.S.).

Conference in Support of Iraq in Washington DC, which was hosted by the US Secretary of State Kerry with the aim of addressing the serious humanitarian crisis in Iraq, and co-chaired it with counterparts from the U.S. and Germany. Japan announced an additional 10 million US dollars of humanitarian and stabilization assistance while expressing its intention to maintain humanitarian and stabilization assistance worth approximately 100 million US dollars in 2017 and 2018 with the aim of addressing the worsening humanitarian situation in Iraq.

Currently, Iraq is confronting a serious

financial situation due to factors such as the falling oil prices and the accumulating cost of war. Against this backdrop, 3.6 billion US dollars for humanitarian and stabilization assistance was collected from the G7 countries as a whole at the G7 Ise-Shima Summit which Japan held the presidency. This was to avoid destabilization of Iraq, which is at the forefront in the fight against terrorism, due to the financial crisis.

Regarding high-level visits, Iraqi Oil Minister Abdul-Mahdi visited Japan in February and had an active exchange of views with Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Motoo Hayashi, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Muto, and Japanese business representatives with the aim of strengthening bilateral relations, particularly the economic relations.

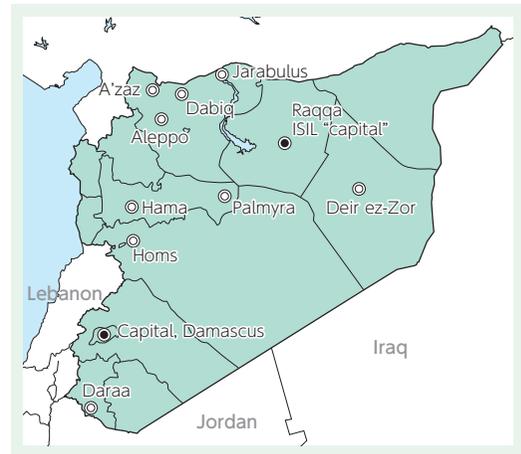
## 2 Syria

### (1) Status in Syria

There was no sign of abatement during 2016 for the Syrian crisis that commenced in 2011. As of the end of 2016, the situation in Syria is considered to be this century's worst humanitarian crisis with more than 250,000 deaths, 4.8 million refugees, and 6.5 million internally-displaced persons. Within Syria, there has been continued violent conflict among four competing parties: the Syrian government, the moderate rebels, extremist forces including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Nusra Front, and Kurdish forces.

Under this situation, Syrian Government Forces who are receiving support from Russian airstrikes and other measures have intensified their attacks on the northern city of Aleppo, which had been the home of the rebels from the outset of the Syrian crisis.

### The complete map of Syria



They virtually had control of all of Aleppo by December 15. However, the Syrian Government Forces falls far short to regain control of all of Syria, and the instability continues with ISIL reoccupying Palmyra on December 11.

Several cease-fires were attempted during 2016. Cease-fire agreements were reached between the U.S. and Russia in February and September, and combat temporarily subsided, but the agreement was breached and the battle once again intensified. In addition, a cease-fire agreement brokered by Russia and Turkey came into effect on December 30, but it is unpredictable if this cease-fire will be honored by the disputing parties or lead to a subsequent political process.

The fight against ISIL has involved ongoing airstrikes within Syrian territory by the U.S. and others, and progress has been made with the operation to liberate Mosul in Iraq. In addition, from August the Turkish Army together with the Free Syrian Army made inroads into Northern Syria. From November, the Kurdish Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG) or the People's Protection Units, which makes up the core of the Syrian

Democratic Forces, commenced operations towards recapturing Raqqa in Eastern Syria, which ISIL refers to as its capital. ISIL has gradually lost its power and while the area in Syria under ISIL control is gradually shrinking, conditions remain chaotic.

## (2) Political Process and Test for the International Community

Intra-Syrian talks between the Syrian government and rebels commenced in January in an indirect format brokered by the UN. After a temporary suspension in February due to increased fighting, talks were held in March and April but then stalled once again. Discussion between the Syrian government and opposition groups is vital to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis, so there is an ongoing discussion including amongst the international community towards a resumption of the Intra-Syrian talks.

The activities by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) is one of the initiatives of the international community. A meeting of the ISSG was held in October 2015, as an extension of the Summit of Foreign Ministers from the U.S., Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey to include related countries and institutions, and this framework has continued in 2016. At the meeting of the ISSG in February (Munich), a statement was issued concerning humanitarian access to the conflict area, a nationwide cessation of hostilities in Syria, and the establishment of a humanitarian task force and a cease-fire task force. Furthermore, participation in the ISSG by Japan, Australia, and the Netherlands was approved. Japan participated in the May ISSG meeting (Vienna) for the first time (attended by Japan's Ambassador



Prime Minister Abe, attending the UN Security Council High-Level Briefing on Syria (September 21, New York, U.S.). (Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)

in charge of Syrian Affairs), and Foreign Minister Kishida attended the September ISSG meeting (New York).

There was disorder at the United Nations (UN), with the UN Security Council failing to adopt two draft resolutions from Russia and from France and Spain on October 8, but UN Security Council Resolution 2328 on protection of Aleppo civilians was adopted on December 19 and UN Security Council Resolution 2332 concerning humanitarian assistance was adopted on December 21. In addition, a UN General Assembly resolution concerning a cease-fire in Aleppo and humanitarian assistance was adopted on December 9 and a UN General Assembly resolution concerning the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the most serious crimes in Syria was adopted by majority vote on December 21. Furthermore, UN Security Council Resolution 2336 welcoming the Syrian cease-fire agreement brokered by Russia and Turkey was unanimously adopted on December 31.

## (3) The Japanese Government's Efforts

Japan has consistently maintained a stance that a military solution will not be found in the Syrian crisis and that

a political solution is indispensable. At the same time, Japan also attaches the importance to continue support to stave off further aggravation of the humanitarian situation through ongoing assistance. From this standpoint, following the aggravated situation in Syria, Japan has provided assistance worth more than 1.66 billion US dollars to Syria and neighboring countries by the end of 2016 for humanitarian assistance. Since becoming a UN Security Council non-permanent member in 2016, Japan has actively contributed to the discussion regarding the issue at the UN Security Council, and also led the discussion at the G7 Ise-Shima Summit during Japan's presidency of the G7. Apart from this, Japan has continued to put pressure on the relevant parties in areas such as ensuring humanitarian access and cease-fires. Japan intends to continue its efforts for the improvement and stabilization of the situation surrounding Syria, mainly through humanitarian support which is Japan's strength and in close coordination together with other members of UN Security Council and the international community.

### 3 Iran

Iran is a major Shia-Muslim regional power with land of approximately 4.4 times the size of Japan with a population of about 80 million and is blessed with abundant natural resources. Japan has maintained and strengthened a historically friendly relationship with Iran from the viewpoints of ensuring the stable supply of crude oil and the stability of the Middle East region.

The Rouhani administration, which took office in August 2013, engaged in the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear

issue with the EU3 (UK, France, and Germany) +3 (U.S., China, and Russia), and announced a nuclear agreement, "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)," in Vienna in July 2015. In accordance with the nuclear agreement, the U.S. and Europe partially suspended or terminated sanctions against Iran in conjunction with the end of sanction related rules against Iran under past UN Security Council resolutions in January 2016 (the "implementation day" under JCPOA).

The scope of cooperation between Japan and Iran has expanded in various areas since the "implementation day." To strengthen the Japan-Iran economic relations, the Japan-Iran Investment Agreement was signed between Foreign Minister Kishida and Iran's Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance Taiebnia during his visit to Japan in February. A Memorandum of Cooperation with Iran concerning Establishment of a Finance Facility, equivalent to as much as 10 billion US dollars, was also signed. In addition, each working group under the jointly established Japan-Iran Cooperation Council, which agreed to be established with Iran's Foreign Minister Zarif during Foreign Minister Kishida's visit to Iran in October 2015, has been working actively and progress in cooperation in environment, transport and nuclear safety areas such as Japan's contribution to the Lake Urmia Restoration Project, a high-level meeting between transportation authorities (Acting Minister of Roads and Urban Development Kashan visited Japan in July 2016) and negotiations for the implementation of the Nuclear Safety Training Course.

Steadily implementing the nuclear agreement is vital for strengthening the system of global non-proliferation and

stabilizing the Middle East, so Japan continues to provide assistance. In order to resolve various issues in the region, Japan has been repeatedly urging Iran to promote confidence-building with the international community and regional countries and to play a constructive role in stabilizing the region. Also, Japan has been reinforcing the traditional relationship even further with Iran through the framework of multi-layered bilateral dialogue including high-level political exchanges. A summit meeting was also held on the occasion of the UN General Assembly for the first time since ‘implementation day’ in September (the 5th such summit since the inauguration of the Rouhani Administration). Prime Minister Abe said that he appreciated Iran’s compliance with the nuclear agreement and had high hopes for continued implementation. In addition, in December while on an economic mission, Iran’s Foreign Minister Zarif visited Japan for the first time in two years. He paid his respects to Prime Minister Abe as well as holding the 6th Japan-Iran Foreign Ministerial Meeting with Foreign Minister Kishida. Foreign Minister Kishida conveyed that Japan had decided to provide through the IAEA, 550,000 euros for collaboration in the area of nuclear safety and 1.5 million euros for the area of safeguard measures as Japan’s support for ongoing compliance with the nuclear agreement. He also urged Iran to take a more constructive role in resolving the various issues in the Middle East.

Apart from this, there were active high-level visits with a view to further strengthening the bilateral relationship including visits to Iran by Special Advisor to the Prime Minister, Katsuyuki Kawai, in February and State Minister for Foreign

Affairs, Kentaro Sonoura, in September, while Iran’s Energy Minister Hamid Chitchian visited Japan in October.

#### 4 Afghanistan

At the end of September, the National Unity Government (NUG), which was inaugurated after agreeing to a power-sharing arrangement between President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, marked two years in office, but the NUG continues to face significant challenges. There have been repeated terrorist attacks across the country by the Taliban and ISIL-Khorasan Province, and there have been many victims amongst the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) and the foreign troops providing support to ANDSF, while civilian victims are also on the rise. In terms of the essential reconciliation with anti-government forces needed to achieve long-term stability in the country, a peace pact was signed with the Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin in September, but there have been no achievements towards a reconciliation with the larger force of the Taliban. In addition, the deterioration in relations between the president and the chief executive, and the dismissal of seven cabinet ministers for corruption, also show signs of turmoil in internal affairs.

The self-reliance of and stability in Afghanistan are crucially important for the stability of the international community and the prosperity of the region. Throughout 2016, the international community indicated strong intent to continuously support the endeavors of the NUG. At the NATO Warsaw Summit in July, a commitment to continue assistance

in the security field was announced. At the “Brussels Conference on Afghanistan” in October, the participants confirmed total pledges of about 15.2 billion US dollars for development assistance until 2020. State Minister for Foreign Affairs Sonoura, who was attending the conference, announced that effort would be made to continue assistance worth up to 40 billion yen a year in aid to maintain the current level of Japan’s assistance while calling on Afghanistan to advance various reforms in areas such as corruption, depravity, and electoral reform.

## 5 Middle East Peace Process

### (1) Developments in Middle East Peace Process

The U.S. mediation led to direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine from July 2013 to April 2014. However, they faltered in the face of a wide gap in the positions of the two sides, and there have been no signs of resumption since then.

The security situation has been worsening in Israel and at the West Bank since around mid-2015 with frequent collisions between Israelis and Palestinians. While the situation appeared to subside from the beginning of 2016, the mutual distrust is strong and there is no sense of moving towards peace. In addition, Israel continues its settlement policy and the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip has been deteriorating as well.

The international community has continued to urge both Israel and Palestine to resume the negotiations at an early date to improve such situation. In particular, France called for an international conference in an attempt to break through

the status quo. To discuss all sorts of means to resume negotiations and reaffirm the two-state solution, a ministerial-level meeting was held in June for major countries other than Israel and Palestine and attended by Japanese Special Envoy for the Middle East Peace.

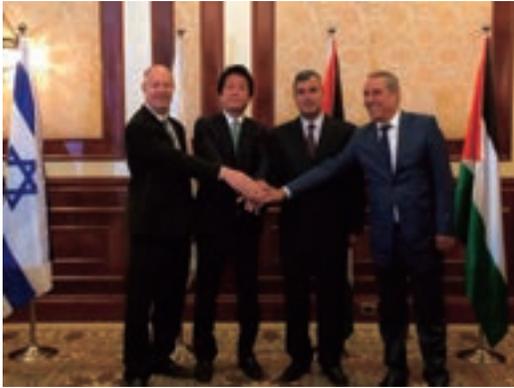
On December 23, the UN Security Council adopted UN Security Council Resolution 2334 demanding that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities, with 14 countries, including Japan, voting for the resolution and the one country (the U.S.) abstaining.

This was followed by a speech that included a plan for the basis of future peace negotiations given by U.S. Secretary of State Kerry on December 28. In addition, France convened a Conference for Middle East Peace in Paris on January 15, 2017, attended by Japan’s State Minister for Foreign Affairs Sonoura.

### (2) The Japanese Government’s Efforts

In cooperation with the international community, Japan has approached Israel and Palestine to achieve a “two-state solution.” Political dialogues were conducted at all levels involving the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and special envoy of the Government of Japan for the Middle East peace. Japan is also making an effort to contribute to confidence-building between Israel and Palestine by inviting relevant people from both sides to Japan.

In January 2015, Prime Minister Abe met with Prime Minister Netanyahu in Israel and President Abbas in Palestine, directly urging both leaders to advance the process for a solution to the Middle East issue. President Abbas visited Japan in February



State Minister for Foreign Affairs Sonoura, attending the 5th Ministerial Meeting of the Four-Party Consultative Unit for the "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" (September 7, 2016, Jericho, Palestine).

2016, and the Japan side encouraged him to take a flexible approach and resume the negotiations at an early date.

Japan's support for Palestine since 1993 amounts to 1.7 billion US dollars, covering humanitarian support, job creation, healthcare, agriculture, and a variety of fields. The "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" initiative is Japan's unique effort to address Palestine's economic self-sustainability specifically in cooperation with Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. Palestinian private-sector companies have started operations at the currently being developed Jericho Agro-Industrial Park, a flagship project of this initiative, and it is expected that more companies will participate and create new employment opportunities. A ministerial meeting of the four parties in this initiative (Japan, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan) was convened in September, chaired by State Minister for Foreign Affairs Sonoura. Participants agreed that they would cooperate to develop the initiative.

The Government of Japan engages in tripartite cooperation with Asian nations under the framework of the "Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian

Development (CEAPAD)" aiming to mobilize Asian countries for practical assistance to Palestine.

## 6 Countries in the Middle East and North Africa

### (1) Turkey

Turkey is a geopolitically important large country in the region located at the crossroads to Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Caucasia. As a member state of NATO, the government of Turkey basically attaches importance to Europe and U.S. in its diplomacy, including efforts to join EU, while proactively promoting multiple diplomacies with states covering Asia and Africa. Turkey is historically a pro-Japanese country typified by episodes such as the visit of Ottoman Empire's Ertugrul Frigate to Japan and the subsequent disaster in 1890 and Turkey's 1985 rescue of Japanese nationals living in Tehran.

The coup d'état attempted by factions within the Turkish army on July 15 ended in failure on July 16, and the Turkish government declared a state of emergency claiming that Fethullah Gulen, the leader of an Islamist movement in Turkey who is currently living in exile in the U.S., was behind the incident. Dismissals and monitoring of persons in the army, security authorities and public servants, who are mainly said to have connections to Gulen continue.

On the diplomatic front, the relations between Turkey and Syria have deteriorated under the Assad Administration and its ongoing civil war, and Turkey is faced with being the world's largest recipient of refugees totaling about three million. The tensions with Western countries and



Japan-Turkey Summit Meeting (September 21, New York, U.S., Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)

neighboring countries are growing with the fight against ISIL and response to the refugee issue. However, an agreement was reached in June to normalize relations with Israel, which had deteriorated with Israel following the conflict between the Israel army and a flotilla of ships transporting aid to the Gaza Strip in May 2010. Furthermore, there has been progress in strategic diplomacy since June such as an initiative to normalize relations with Russia, which had deteriorated following the downing of a Russian fighter jet in November 2015.

In respect to the relationship with Japan, Prime Minister Abe met with President Erdogan in New York in September and held their sixth summit, confirming the high trust between the two leaders and stronger bilateral relations.

## (2) Jordan and Lebanon

The situation in Jordan remains comparatively stable in the constantly turbulent Middle East region. Jordan has played an important role in the peace and stability of the region, such as with countermeasures against extremists, its acceptance of a number of Syrian refugees, and active involvement in the Middle East peace process. The country's role is highly appreciated by the international



Japan-Jordan Summit Meeting (October 27, Tokyo). (Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)

community.

Apart from a leaders' meeting at the April Nuclear Security Summit, there have been frequent coming and goings of the Prime Minister and ministers in 2016, such as the King Abdullah II's visit to Japan in October, and the traditionally friendly bilateral relations have deepened even further. At each meeting, the leaders shared the view of cooperating for further development of the bilateral relations in a wide range of areas and stabilization of the Middle East region.

Japan also attaches importance to Jordan, which serves as a cornerstone for the stability of the region. The Government of Japan has been providing assistance for the stability of Jordan through support for refugees and host communities, as well as for developing the industrial base. In 2016, Japan provided support such as a "Financial Sector, Business Environment and Public Service Reform Development Policy Loan" (30 billion yen), as well as grant aid (one billion yen).

Lebanon is a mosaic nation consisting of 18 religions and religious sects, including Christianity and Islam. Due to the confrontation between each sect and political force surrounding a successor to President Suleiman, who stepped down

in May 2014, the position of President had remained vacant for about two and a half years, but former leader of the Free Patriotic Movement Aoun was finally elected President in October 2016. Consequently, the Hariri Cabinet was formed in December, with initiatives being promoted to stabilize domestic affairs. The future focus of domestic affairs is the parliamentary elections scheduled for May 2017, which have been previously postponed twice.

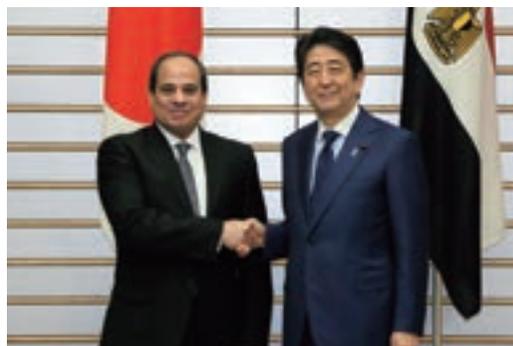
Lebanon is facing serious problems such as the deteriorating situation in Syria and the expansion of ISIL. Stability in Lebanon is the key to the stability and prosperity of the Middle East. Japan has provided Lebanon with humanitarian aid totaling more than 120 million US dollars for assistance to Syrian refugees and the host communities.

### (3) Egypt

Located at the north-eastern edge of the African continent and facing Europe on the other side of the Mediterranean, Egypt is a major country which plays an important role in the stability of the Middle East and North Africa.

Egypt swore in a new parliament (House of Representatives) in January 2016, completing the “roadmap” which had been developed after the political turmoil in 2013. The El-Sisi Administration is taking initiatives in security policies and economic reforms on the Sinai Peninsula etc., for Egypt’s long-term stability and development, while being a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for two years from 2016.

Japan-Egypt relations are fairly good and high-level exchanges are also active. President El-Sisi visited Japan in February



Japan-Egypt Summit Meeting (February 29, Tokyo Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)

and during this visit, three documents (in the areas of education, energy, and health) which include the Japan-Egypt Joint Statement and the Egypt-Japan Education Partnership (EJEP) were released. Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Takisawa visited Egypt in August, followed by State Minister for Foreign Affairs Sonoura in September. Furthermore, the two leaders of Japan and Egypt held a meeting at the G20 Summit in Hangzhou (China) in September.

### (4) Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco

The Maghreb is at the crossroads to Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, and has shared history, culture, and language in common. Recently it has attracted attention because of a potential as a region. On the other hand, many people move from the region across Iraq and Syria as foreign fighters, and there is also the trend in Libya, so the stability of the security situation is an important issue.

Libya has fallen into a situation of serious conflict among several groups rooted in tribes and has experienced security deterioration. A national unity government of three factions exists based on the political agreement that was brokered by the UN, as well as the west (Tripoli) and east (Tobruk)

factions. The national unity government entered the capital in March, but it has still not been recognized by the parliament established by the east faction. The militia which supports the government took control of major ISIL bases in December, but other extremist organizations are very active and the security situation remains unstable. It is expected that the national unity government will achieve legal legitimacy with government recognition of the parliament to achieve stability of the country and the neighboring region.

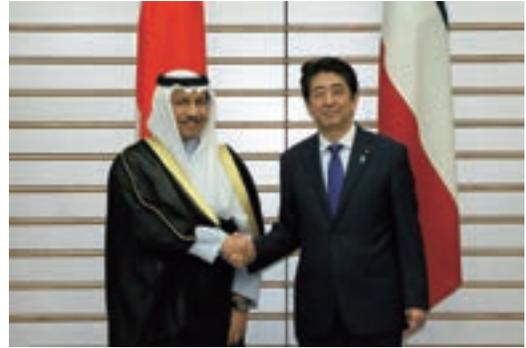
Tunisia, which has achieved a transition to democracy, is facing the issues of economic reform such as eliminating the economic disparity between regions. The security situation has been calm since the attack on security forces in the region near the Libyan border in March, but the Libyan situation also has an influence and ensuring security remains an important issue.

Algeria and Morocco continue to have stable governments. The two countries make efforts to contribute to peace and stability in the region by mediating the domestic confrontations in Libya and Mali. In addition, Morocco was approved to rejoin the African Union in January. Close attention is being paid to future trends such as the unification of Maghreb.

#### (5) Gulf Countries (including Yemen)

##### **A** Six Gulf countries (the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain)

The Gulf countries as stabilizing forces of the region are important partners for Japan in areas such as energy security. There were frequent high-level visits including the visit of the Prime Minister of Kuwait, H.H. Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad



Prime Minister Abe and Prime Minister of Kuwait, H.H. Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, shake hands at the Japan-Kuwait Summit Meeting (May 12, Tokyo, Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)



Prime Minister Abe meets with Deputy Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, H.R.H Prince Mohammad bin Salman (September 1, Tokyo, Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)

Al-Sabah in May and Deputy Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, H.R.H Prince Mohammad bin Salman in September.

Amid considerable challenges in the Middle East region, Saudi Arabia and several Arab states cut diplomatic ties with Iran in 2016, and Yemen peace talks stalled with the increasing number of civilian casualties.

The Gulf states need to review their fiscal policy following a decline in their annual revenue due to low oil prices since summer 2014. They consider social and economic infrastructure development, industrial diversification, and human resource development as important issues with a view to the long-term goal of breaking dependence on oil and developing the private sector. In April 2016, “Saudi Vision 2030” was announced with a basic strategy to move away from its dependency on oil and

to achieve its comprehensive development. Japan engages in improving the mutual business and investment environment by concluding various agreements with the Gulf states while continuing to strengthen the “Comprehensive Partnerships” in a wide range of fields beyond energy.

### **B** Yemen

Fighting between the government forces supported by the Arab coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia and the anti-government forces such as Houthi insurgents has continued in Yemen since 2015. Following a cease-fire in April 2016, peace talks resumed in Kuwait, but ended without reaching any agreement. The fighting has subsequently intensified. Currently, the UN and relevant parties such as the U.S., the UK, and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries continue mediation efforts for peace.

The humanitarian situation is extremely serious due to the protracted conflict and aggravated combat. Consequently, the Government of Japan has provided assistance to overcome the humanitarian crisis in Yemen through efforts such as announcing new food assistance at the Meeting on the Humanitarian Situation in Yemen at the UN General Assembly in September, which is highly appreciated by the government of Yemen and the international community.