

Section 6

The Middle East and North Africa

Overview

The Middle East and North Africa is situated in a geopolitically important location at 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 crude oil and natural gas, to the rest of the world. On the other hand, the region faces a number of destabilizing issues such as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other violent extremist groups, the vast numbers of refugees that are flowing into nearby regions, the prolongation of the crisis in Syria, the situation in Iraq, the Middle East Peace Process, the tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the situation surrounding Qatar, and domestic conditions in Afghanistan, Yemen, and Libya. Achieving peace and stability in this region is of great importance for the world as a whole, including Japan. Japan is working with the global community to resolve these issues. Japan is also working with the global community in areas such as humanitarian aid, stabilization assistance,



The First Japan-Arab Political Dialogue (September 11, Cairo, Egypt)

and mid- and long-term development cooperation while encouraging related countries to engage in initiatives aimed at achieving regional stability.

Japan relies on the Middle East for more than 80% of its crude oil imports and has developed ties with countries in the Middle East and North Africa region (hereinafter, “countries in the Middle East”) that have centered on resources and energy. Today, however, beyond these relationships Japan works to build more multi-layered ones in the areas such as wide-ranging economic cooperation, politics and security, and culture and people-to-people exchanges. Prime Minister Abe has visited this region six times since the inauguration of the

second Abe administration in December 2012. Foreign Minister Kono has also visited the region four times since taking on his current position in August 2017. There have also been a number of high-level visits, meetings, and talks, and the Government of Japan is working more proactively to strengthen ties with countries in the region.

In particular, Foreign Minister Kono has given strong commitment to this region as one of six pillars of his foreign policy. He outlined his “Kono Four Principles¹,” -basic Middle East policies based on Japan’s achievements so far in the region at the first Japan-Arab Political Dialogue, held in Egypt in September 2017. The four principles are: (1) intellectual and human contribution, (2) investment in people, (3) enduring efforts, and (4) enhancing political efforts.

The Middle East Peace Process has stagnated since negotiations between Israel and Palestine faltered in April 2014. Japan is utilizing its friendly relations with countries in the Middle East to provide support from an impartial perspective aimed at resolving the issue of peace in the Middle East. At a series of summit meetings and foreign ministerial meetings held during high-level visits, Japan has expressed its support for finding a resolution through dialogue between both parties and is working to encourage peace negotiations. Japan has also made steady progress with its own efforts to provide support to the Palestinians, including the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative and the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD). With the announcement in December 2017 by U.S. president Trump that the U.S.

Embassy in Israel would be relocated to Jerusalem, the circumstances surrounding the issue of peace in the Middle East have become more complicated. This led Foreign Minister Kono to visit Israel and Palestine to lobby both sides.

Although the area controlled by ISIL is decreasing in size, violent extremism continues to be a source of instability for the Middle East and is a serious issue for the international community as a whole. Since the beginning of the crisis in Syria, Japan has provided support worth more than 1.9 billion US dollars in total to Syria, Iraq, and other neighboring countries, including the provision of yen loans to Turkey and Jordan, which have been affected by an influx of Syrian refugees. Japan has used a number of opportunities, including the first Japan-Arab Political Dialogue (held in September 2017), to show a stance to support the creation of inclusive societies that do not produce violent extremism, through providing humanitarian aid to refugees and displaced persons, improving economic infrastructure, developing human resources, and so on.

With regard to Iran, the “Implementation Day” of the final agreement on the nuclear issue was reached in January 2016, and the U.S. and the EU partially suspended or terminated sanctions against Iran. Following the final agreement, Japan has continued to support the nuclear agreement which would strengthen the global non-proliferation system and contribute to stability in the Middle East. Japan is making efforts to further strengthen relations with Iran following the implementation of the agreement through cooperation to

¹ The address given by Foreign Minister Kono, at the First Japan-Arab Political Dialogue in September 2017. URL: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000288921.pdf>

encourage the steady implementation of the final agreement by Iran and the conclusion of the bilateral investment agreement.

In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Egypt, and other countries announced termination of diplomatic relations with Qatar for a number of reasons including Qatar's support for terrorism. Japan supports mediation efforts by Kuwait and calls for a resolution through dialogue, emphasizing the importance of the unity of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for peace and stability in the Middle East.

In recent years, the Middle Eastern 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 the EPA, 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.

1 Situation in Middle East Region

(1) Iraq

In 2017, developments which are mutually contradictory on Iraq's unity were seen. While Iraqi ethnic groups and religious sects teamed together to successfully liberate all Iraqi territory from "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)" control, the tensions between Iraq's Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) became heightened after a referendum on independence of the Kurdistan region.

► The complete map of Iraq



The operations against ISIL were carried out with cooperation among Iraq's Federal Government security forces, Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) which are primarily made up of Shia paramilitary fighters, and the KRG's Peshmerga security forces, and have successfully liberated major cities including Mosul in July. In December, Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi declared that all Iraqi territory had been liberated from ISIL control.

On the other hand, the KRG went through with a referendum on independence of the Kurdistan region (including disputed areas with the Federal Government) despite strong opposition from the Federal Government and the international community. The Federal Government responded to this by deploying security forces to Kirkuk and other disputed areas. As a result, the KRG lost almost all of the disputed areas and KRG President Barzani subsequently resigned.

The operations to liberate Iraq from ISIL have resulted in a large number of internally displaced persons, and their early return to their home becomes the primary issue to

address towards reconstruction. Against this backdrop, Japan provided, in January, approximately 100 million US dollars of humanitarian and stabilization assistance via international organizations which included provision of food, water and other daily commodities to displaced persons, as well as repairing houses and providing vocational training, in order to assist their early return and settlement. In September, Japan also provided 4.5 million US dollars in humanitarian and stabilization assistance via international organizations. In addition, Japan is contributing to the restoration of Iraq's infrastructure through yen-loan projects in areas such as electricity. Furthermore, based on the announcement at the G7 Ise-Shima Summit in 2016, Japan is supporting the restoration of Iraq's finances, which have suffered from factors such as falling oil prices and increased war-related costs.

With regard to Japan-Iraq relations, the Consular Office of Japan in Erbil was opened in January, with the aim of providing safety for Japanese nationals in Iraq and following the Kurdistan regional issues. Concerning high-level visits, State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sonoura visited Iraq in January. He again visited Iraq in August as Special Advisor to the Prime Minister. State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sato also visited Iraq in November. During these visits, discussions were held on how to strengthen bilateral ties toward 2019, which will be marking the 80th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. On the other hand, seven Iraqi parliamentary members visited Japan in February to attend "the Seminar on Knowledge Sharing" toward utilizing Japanese knowhow for reconstruction and national reconciliation.

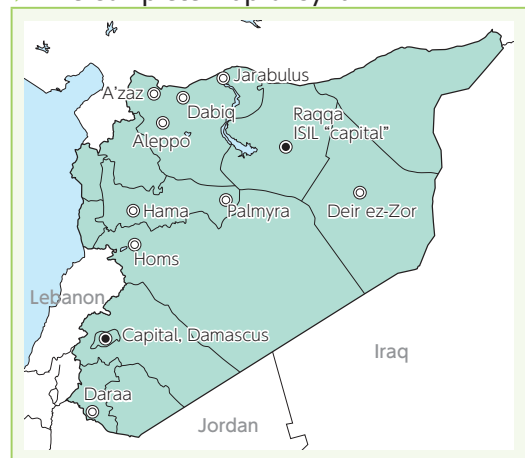
(2) Syria

A Current Situation in Syria, and the Decline of ISIL

The ongoing Syrian crisis, which began in 2011, is considered to be this century's worst humanitarian crisis. As of the end of 2017, between 320,000 and 470,000 people have died, more than 5 million people have become refugees, and approximately 6.3 million people have become internally-displaced persons.

Although the Syrian crisis is becoming protracted, the power of ISIL has diminished considerably. The Syrian Democratic Forces, which receive support from the U.S.-led coalition in Syria, has been fighting ISIL on the northeastern bank of the Euphrates River. On June 6, 2017, the SDF launched an attack on Raqqa, the city that ISIL referred to as their capital, and formally announced on October 20 that the city had been liberated. Syrian Government Forces have also pushed forward with their fight against ISIL on the southwest bank of the Euphrates River, and announced on November 3, the liberation of Deir ez-Zor, eastern Syria's major city, and on November 9, the liberation of Abu

► The complete map of Syria



Kamal, a city near the border with Iraq. Although ISIL still retains a certain amount of power, they have lost all of their urban bases, and it is thought that ISIL's power has diminished substantially.

On the other hand, although fighting between the Syrian Government and rebel forces has calmed somewhat due to endeavors in 2017 to bring about a ceasefire, there have been ceasefire violations, etc., and fighting is continuing, and the humanitarian situation continues to be harsh. The situation in areas that are under siege is particularly serious, with shortages of food and medicine. Providing humanitarian support and carrying out medical evacuations in such areas is a major issue that needs to be addressed. The Syrian Government, which is receiving support from Russia and Iran, has now gained the upper hand in the conflict but is yet to regain control over all Syrian territory.

On April 4, 2017, a chemical attack was made on the town of Khan Shaykhun. In response to this, the U.S. military launched cruise missiles at the Syrian Government's Shayrat air force base (the air base from which the aircraft involved in the chemical attack is believed to have taken off from and landed at). There have been several suspected cases of the use of chemical weapons in Syria and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations' Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) has concluded that four cases have been carried out so far by the Syrian Government (including the Khan Shaykhun case) and two have been carried out by ISIL.

B Attempts at implementing a ceasefire (the Astana Process, etc.)

Amid these circumstance, on January 23 and 24, 2017, the Syrian Government and Syrian armed rebel groups held the first round of Astana Talks (marking the beginning of the Astana Process) primarily focused on discussing a ceasefire, with Russia, Iran, and Turkey acting as guarantor states. These talks were held eight times during 2017. The 6th round of talks held on September 14 and 15 produced a number of results including the declaration that four de-escalation zones would be established in Syria, namely, (1) Eastern Ghouta, (2) an area in north of the Homs Governorate, (3) the Idlib Governorate and adjoining districts, and (4) part of southern Syria.

On July 7, 2017, the U.S., Russia, and Jordan agreed to a ceasefire in southwestern Syria. The international community continues to make efforts to implement a ceasefire.

C Political Process

The United Nations' Geneva peace talks on Syria were held in 2017 from February 23 to March 3, marking the recommencement of the dialogue process (the Geneva Process), which had been suspended in March 2016. The Geneva peace talks are ongoing and involve discussions between the Syrian Government and Syrian rebel groups on issues such as governance, constitution, elections, and terrorism, with the aim of moving toward a political resolution of the Syrian crisis with mediation from the UN.

In addition, at the 7th round of Astana Talks held on October 30 and 31, Russia proposed that a wide range of Syrian nationals, armed groups, religious groups, etc., be invited to a Syria National Dialogue

Congress. At the 8th round of the Astana Talks held on December 21 and 22 the guarantor states (Russia, Iran, and Turkey) reached agreement on the holding of such a congress meeting.

D The Japanese Government's Efforts

Japan has consistently maintained a stance that the crisis in Syria cannot be resolved by any military means, and a political solution is indispensable. At the same time, Japan also attaches importance to continuing 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 1.9 billion US dollars to Syria and neighboring countries by the end of 2017 for humanitarian assistance. Since becoming a UN Security Council non-permanent member from 2016 to 2017, Japan has actively contributed to discussions concerning the issue at the UN Security Council. Japan has also continued to put pressure on the relevant parties in areas such as ensuring humanitarian access and ceasefires. Japan intends to continue its efforts in close coordination with the international community to improve and stabilize the situation in Syria, with focus on humanitarian support, which is Japan's forte.

(3) Iran

Iran is a major Shiite 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 traditionally friendly relationship from the viewpoints of

ensuring the stable supply of crude oil and the stability of the Middle East region.

The "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)" agreed in July 2015 by Iran and the EU3 (UK, France, Germany and EU) +3 (U.S., China, and Russia) reached "Implementation Day" in January 2016, and, the U.S. and the EU partially suspended or terminated sanctions against Iran in conjunction with the end of sanction-related rules against Iran established under past UN Security Council resolutions. Since the agreement, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has been continuously verifying and monitoring Iran's compliance with the agreement's terms, and the agency has reported that Iran is fulfilling its commitments under the agreement. Since taking office, U.S. President Trump has stressed the needs to firmly respond to destabilizing activities and others of Iran. In October 2017, President Trump announced that he would not certify the nuclear agreement (the need for certification is a domestic U.S. legal formality imposed on the agreement). In September, Japan worked with the IAEA to provide training on safeguards to employees of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran. In addition, in Japan-Iran Foreign Ministers' telephone conversations in October, Japan expressed its support for the nuclear agreement as it contributes to the strengthening of the global non-proliferation regime and stabilization of the Middle East. Japan also expressed its hopes for a resolution through dialogue, and that it would continue to back steady and continued implementation of the agreement. Prime Minister Abe sent a message to President Rouhani congratulating him for his reelection in presidential election held

in May 2017, and expressed the hope that further progress will be made in creating an even more constructive relationship between Iran and the international community. In September, special envoy of the Prime Minister, Masahiko Komura visited Iran and expressed to President Rouhani the hope that Iran would play a constructive role in regional stability based on an environment in which compliance with the nuclear agreement continues. The 6th Japan-Iran Summit Meeting since President Rouhani took office was held at the UN General Assembly in New York, and shared views on pursuing cooperation in a wide range of sectors including not only politics and economy but also medical, the environment, culture, and tourism. The 1st Iran-Japan Foreign Ministers' talk since Foreign Minister Kono took office was also held, exchanging frank opinions on the nuclear agreement and the situation in the Middle East.

Since the arrival of Implementation Day, Japan and Iran have engaged not only in high-level political exchanges, but have also expanded cooperation in a wide range of fields based on a framework of exchange and dialogue on a variety of different levels.

2017 saw a great deal of activity with high-level visits relating to a range of different fields including visits by the Vice President of Iran for Women and Family Affairs (February); the Vice President of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization of Iran (March); and a visit to Iran by State Minister of Environment, Yoshihiro Seki (May). In addition, a working group on the environment, culture, sport, economic cooperation, healthcare, trade, and investment was established under the Japan-Iran Cooperation Council based on

an agreement between the foreign ministers of the two countries, and meetings of this working group have featured discussions aimed at achieving further progress with cooperation in various fields.

On the economic front, the lifting and easing of sanctions lead to a greater level of international business activities, and in 2016, Iran's real GDP growth was 6.5%—a switch to high growth from negative growth in the previous year. In 2016 trade between the two countries also increased, with Japan's exports to Iran increasing by 3.4% compared with 2015, and imports from Iran also increasing 3.4% compared with 2015. In April, the Japan-Iran Investment Agreement also came into effect. Japan has also engaged in other initiatives aimed at improving Iran's business environment.

(4) Gulf States (including Yemen)

The Gulf states (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain) are important partners for Japan, helping to maintain Japan's energy security. There have been a large number of high-level visits to and from the Gulf states. In March, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman of Saudi Arabia became the first Saudi King to visit Japan in 46 years. UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Abdullah visited Japan in April. In early September and early and late December, Foreign Minister Kono visited three times in total to the Middle East, resulting in visits to all six Gulf states to hold talks with Foreign Ministers. In particular, Foreign Minister Kono participated in the 13th session of the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain, becoming the first Japanese Foreign Minister to attend a Manama Dialogue, a series of

meetings held to discuss the issue of security in the gulf region. Foreign Minister Kono's first telephone conversations after assuming the role of Minister for Foreign Affairs, was conducted with Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed in August. In September Foreign Minister Kono also made a courtesy call to the Crown Prince. Steady progress is being made on the strengthening of relations with important figures in Middle Eastern countries.

Economic conditions in these Gulf states have been affected by a decline in revenue due to low international oil prices. In response, they have prioritized industry diversification and human resources development towards ending reliance on oil and nurturing private sectors. This is particularly true of Saudi Arabia, which announced their "Saudi Vision 2030" which is focused on the issues of employment creation and ending dependence on oil. During the visit to Japan by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman of Saudi Arabia, Japan also announced "Japan-Saudi Vision 2030," as a new guide for future cooperation.

In terms of results contributing to people to people exchanges, in April, UAE citizens with ordinary passports were exempted from having to obtain visas to visit Japan provided that they register them in advance. In September an agreement was reached with Saudi Arabia to, among other things, greatly reduce the cost of visa fees for Japanese citizens visiting Saudi Arabia.

With regard to the political situation, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Egypt and other countries announced termination of diplomatic relations with Qatar in June for a number of reasons including Qatar's support for terrorism. Emir of the State



Prime Minister Abe shaking hands with the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman of Saudi Arabia (March 13, Tokyo; Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)



Foreign Minister Kono, making an address at the 13th session of the Manama Dialogue (December 9, Manama, Bahrain)

of Kuwait Sabah expressed his wish to mediate. Diplomatic mediation between the two sides is ongoing but the situation is currently deadlocked. Maintaining unity in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is crucial for maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East. In June, Prime Minister Abe had telephone conversations with Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed, and Emir of Qatar Tamim, to express his expectation for a rapid resolution to the issue through dialogue. Prime Minister Abe also sent a personal letter to Sheikh Sabah to communicate his support for Kuwait's mediation efforts. During his Middle East tour in September, Foreign Minister Kono held talks with Foreign Minister of Qatar Mohammed and Foreign Minister of Saudi

Arabia Al-Jubeir to communicate Japan's hopes for a rapid resolution through dialogue and Japan's intention of providing support for anything that could lead to a resolution of the issue.

Fighting continues in Yemen's capital, Sanaa, between anti-government forces, the Yemeni military, and the military of the Arab League. The outlook for peace still looks uncertain. Yemeni citizens are suffering due to the adverse humanitarian conditions, which is called the world's largest food crisis, and support from the international community is required. Yemen is located along strategic sea lanes in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, and stability in Yemen is directly tied to Japan's national interests. Japan is providing support aimed at improving the humanitarian situations including 62 million US dollars in aid which was announced in April. The Japan-Yemen Foreign Ministers' meeting was held in September for the first time in the past four years. Japan has announced its intention to commit to working in the long term toward achieving stability in Yemen and carrying out reconstruction.

(5) Middle East Peace Process

A Developments in the Middle East Peace Process

The Middle East Peace Process has stagnated since negotiations between Israel and Palestine faltered in April 2014. Israel is continuing with its settlement policy, mutual mistrust is firmly entrenched, and a return to talks has not been achieved. Humanitarian situations in the Gaza Strip also continue to be severe.

With the inauguration of the Trump administration in the U.S. in 2017, and indications that the administration would

take a proactive stance toward resolving the issue of peace in the Middle East, hope has grown in the international community that it will be possible to break the deadlock. High-level U.S. officials have made repeated visits to Israel and Palestine to listen to the opinions of both sides.

On the other hand, President Trump announced, on December 6 (U.S. Eastern Time), his intention to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Although it was made clear that President Trump's announcement did not forejudge the final status of Jerusalem, many Arabic/Islamic countries expressed their opposition to the announcement as they saw it as being a violation of the established principles of the international community regarding its status. Demonstrations against the announcement were held in some areas, and in Palestine a number of deaths occurred as a result of conflict with Israel's security authorities.

In response, an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council was held and a resolution calling on all countries to refrain from establishing diplomatic missions in Jerusalem and stating that measures contravening past Security Council resolutions concerning Jerusalem would not be accepted was vetoed by the U.S. The same resolution was subsequently put to a vote at the UN General Assembly and this was passed by a majority vote, including a vote from Japan.

B The Government of Japan's Efforts

Japan has been working on political and economic fronts in coordination with the international community toward the achievement of a "two-state solution" that

would enable Israelis and Palestinians to coexist peacefully. Political dialogue has been conducted at all levels involving the Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Special Envoy of the Government of Japan for the Middle East Peace. Japan is contributing toward the creation of an environment that will be essential for achieving peace, and working to build trust between Israelis and Palestinians by inviting officials and youths from both sides to Japan, among others.

In January 2015, Prime Minister Abe met with Prime Minister Netanyahu in Israel and President Abbas in Palestine. When President Abbas visited Japan in February 2016, Prime Minister Abe urged him to take a flexible approach toward the resumption of direct negotiations.

In December 2017, Foreign Minister Kono visited Israel and Palestine to hold talks with Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas, and told them the importance of constructive responses from both parties.

Japan's support for Palestine since 1993 amounts to 1.86 billion US dollars, covering humanitarian support, job creation, healthcare, agriculture, and a variety of other fields. The "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" initiative is Japan's unique effort to enable Palestine to achieve economic self-sustainability in cooperation with Israel, Palestine and Jordan. Several companies have commenced operations at the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park (JAIP), a flagship project of this initiative, and it is expected that more companies will operate and create new employment opportunities. In December 2017, Foreign Minister Kono visited JAIP to attend an unveiling ceremony commemorating the start of Phase II. At the

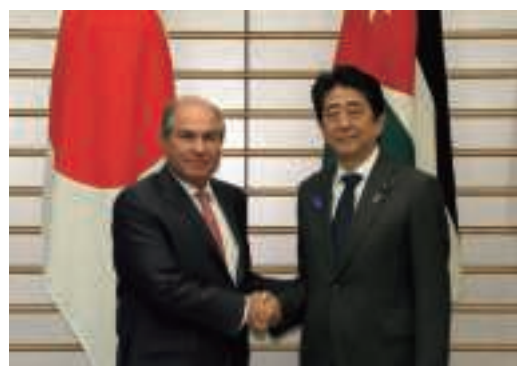
ceremony, he announced that greater focus will be placed on cooperation in the ICT field and improvements of distribution, in order to further enhance the "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity initiative."

Japan engages in tripartite cooperation with Asian countries under the Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD) framework, which was launched by Japan with the aim of encouraging Asian countries to provide support.

(6) Jordan and Lebanon

The situation in Jordan remains relatively stable compared to other parts of the constantly turbulent Middle East region. Jordan has, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah II, played an important role in the peace and stability of the region, such as with countermeasures against extremists, its acceptance of a large number of Syrian refugees, and active involvement in the Middle East Peace Process. The country's role is highly regarded by the international community.

With regard to Jordan's relations with Japan, Prime Minister Abe, in September, held a summit meeting with His Majesty King Abdullah II at the UN General



Japan-Jordan Summit Meeting (July 14, Tokyo; Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)

Assembly in New York, and in July Prime Minister Al-Mulki visited Japan. In September and December, Foreign Minister Kono also visited Jordan to hold talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Safadi. The traditionally favorable relations between Japan and Jordan have been further enhanced with frequent summit meetings and ministerial level visits. The two countries have agreed to coordinate on bringing stability to the Middle East and to further develop the countries' bilateral relations in a wide range of areas such as diplomacy, security, and economics.

Japan also attaches importance to Jordan, which serves as a cornerstone for the stability of the region. Japan has been providing assistance for Jordan's industrial base and for maintenance of stability in the country through support for refugees and host communities. In 2017, Japan again contributed to Jordan's social stability through the provision of support such as 1.4 billion Japanese yen in grant aid to repair and extend water distribution pipe networks in Jordan's Balqa Governorate, which is currently hosting a large number of Syrian refugees.

Lebanon is a nation with a cultural mosaic consisting of 18 religions/sects, including Christianity and Islam. The former leader of the Free Patriotic Movement Aoun was elected President in October 2016 approximately two and a half years after President Suleiman stepped down in May 2014. With this, the Hariri Cabinet was inaugurated in December of the same year. A range of policies are being implemented by the Hariri Cabinet. In particular, regarding reform to electoral

legislation, which had not proved possible to reach an agreement between religious sects, a new electoral law passed in June 2017, and a parliamentary election is now scheduled for May 2018, Lebanon's first parliamentary election since 2009.

In November 2017, there was an incident in which Prime Minister Hariri suddenly announced his resignation while visiting Saudi Arabia. However through mediation by France and the international community, he retracted his resignation in December after having returned to Lebanon.

Lebanon is facing a range of serious issues including the impact of the situation in Syria. Stability in Lebanon is key to the stability and prosperity of the Middle East. Japan has also provided Lebanon with humanitarian aid for assistance to Syrian refugees and the host communities.

(7) Turkey

Turkey is a geopolitically important large country in the region located at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. As a member state of NATO, the Government of Turkey essentially emphasizes Europe and the U.S. in its diplomacy, including making efforts to join the EU, while proactively pursuing multifaceted diplomacy with states in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. Turkey has historically been a pro-Japan country, as typified by episodes such as the Ertugrul Frigate incident in 1890².

Following the attempted coup d'état by factions within the Turkish army on July 15, 2016, the Turkish Government declared a state of emergency claiming that Fethullah Gulen, the leader of an Islamic movement

² For more details of the Ertugrul Frigate incident, refer to: http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle_e/turkey/data.html

in Turkey who is currently living in exile in the U.S., was behind the incident. Dismissals and crackdowns on government officials and persons in the army and security authorities who are thought to have connections to Gulen are continuing.

On the diplomatic front, while Turkey has accepted 3.3 million Syrian refugees and tensions with countries in Europe and North America keep rising, Turkey is cooperating with Russia and Iran on, among other things, the creation of de-escalation zones through the Astana Process. Tensions are also rising with the U.S. over the issues of the extradition of Fethullah Gulen and the provision by the U.S. of weaponry to the PYD and YPG (organizations that are active in Syria that are connected with the PKK, a Turkish terrorist organization involved in the Kurdish independence movement). When a Turkish employee at the U.S. Embassy in Istanbul was arrested by the Turkish authority in October on suspicion of having connections with Fethullah Gulen, U.S. diplomatic offices in Turkey halted the issuance of visas. Turkey



Japan-Turkey Foreign Ministerial Meeting (December 28, Ankara, Turkey)

also took similar measures in response to this (visa issuance resumed at the end of December).

With regard to Turkey's relationship with Japan, Prime Minister Abe met with President Erdogan in New York in September for their 8th Summit Meeting. In June, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Cavusoglu visited Japan, and in December Foreign Minister Kono visited Turkey.

(8) Afghanistan

Although the National Unity Government (NUG) of President Ghani, which was inaugurated in September 2014, has gained the support of the international community and has moved forward with corruption countermeasures, governance reform, and so on, there are still a large number of issues needing to be addressed. In particular, the security situation in Afghanistan continues to be adverse, due to attacks by anti-government forces such as the Taliban. On May 31, a largescale terrorist attack occurred in the capital, Kabul, near the Embassy of Germany (adjacent to the Embassy of Japan) causing over 300 casualties. On the other hand, the NUG is mounting an effort for peace while working closely with the international community,



Japan-Turkey Summit Meeting (September 20, New York, U.S.; Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)

including the gathering officials from key countries and neighboring countries to hold a “Kabul Process Conference,” which is aimed at making progress with peace between the Government of Afghanistan and anti-government forces. In August, U.S. President Trump also announced new strategies in Afghanistan and South Asia, indicating the continued involvement of the U.S. in Afghanistan.

(9) 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.

On the economic front, there has been a tendency toward macroeconomic indicators such as foreign currency reserves and foreign direct investment by introducing a floating exchange rate system in autumn 2016 and reforming the fuel subsidy system as well as the introduction of value-added tax. With regard to security measures, there were challenging issues such as a series of terrorist attacks on the Coptic Christians and an attack on a mosque in the north of the Sinai Peninsula.

Steady progress is seen in Japan-Egypt relationship. Since President El-Sisi’s visit to Japan in February 2016, steady progress has been made on partnership programs as the construction program of Grand Egyptian Museum and the “Egypt-Japan Education Partnership (EJEP),” which includes the introduction of Japanese-style education, an increase in the numbers of Egyptian students and trainees to into Japan, and strengthening support for the Egypt-Japan University of Science and Technology

(E-JUST).

2017 witnessed mutually active high-level visits. There were visits to Japan by the Speaker of Egypt’s House of Representatives, the Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Armed Forces, and the Pope of the Coptic Church. Foreign Minister Kono visited Egypt in September for the first time in approximately five years for a Japanese Foreign Minister. While in Egypt, he gave a speech on Japan’s Middle East diplomacy at the first-ever Japan-Arab Political Dialogue, paid a courtesy call to President El Sisi, and held Japan-Egypt Foreign Ministerial talks.

In October, direct flights between Japan and Egypt resumed. In December, Minister of Investment and International Cooperation Nasr visited Japan and expressed her hope for an increase in investment from Japan at “Egypt Investment Seminar.” The expansion of bilateral relations in the fields of tourism and investment is to be expected.

2 The Situation in the North Africa Region (Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania)

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 the potential as a region. On the other hand, there is the issue of the return to the region from Iraq and Syria of foreign fighters, as well as the issues of refugees and illegal migrants entering Europe, etc. Stabilization of the political system and security situation is a crucial issue.

In Libya, confrontation rooted in tribal society and the worsening of security since the collapse of the Gadhafi administration continues to be serious. There are three

parallel political forces in the country—one in the west (Tripoli) and one in the east (Tobruk) as well as a national unity government that was formed based on mediation from the UN and other parties. In 2017, efforts by the international community (including the efforts listed below) achieved a certain degree of progress toward resolving the Libya issue. In July, talks mediated by France were held between Prime Minister Sarraj of the Government of National Accord, and Field Marshal Haftar of the Libyan National Army. In September, a roadmap was announced by a Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) Salamé. Meetings with neighboring countries (Egypt, Algeria, and Tunisia) were also held in September. On the other hand, there have been reports that some ISIL fighters from Iran and Syria are now shifting the focus of their activities to Libya, and the security situation remains unstable. It is hoped that, for the sake of stability within Libya and in neighboring countries, progress will be made with comprehensive political dialogue in Libya with backing from the international community, and that a legitimate national unity government can be established.

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 2016, but the Libyan situation also has an influence and ensuring security remains an important issue.

The Governments of Algeria and Morocco have remained stable. Both countries are also contributing to peace and stability in the region and are working



State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sato, during his visit to Algeria (December 23, Algiers)

hard to mediate for peace in neighboring countries such as Libya and Mali. Morocco joined the African Union in January 2017 and has also expressed its intention to join the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The future actions of both countries are the subject of much interest.

Although Mauritania shares a long border with the politically unstable Mali, the country is relatively stable compared to other countries in the Sahel Region, and has experienced no terrorist attacks since 2012. In January 2017, Mauritania mediated in a peaceful change of government in Gambia and has contributed to regional stability.

Located in sub-Saharan Africa, Mauritania is the westernmost Arabic country. With regards to the country's relations with Japan, it participated, together with the other north African nations, in the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) in August and also participated in the First Japan-Arab Political Dialogue in September.