

Section 6

The Middle East and North Africa

1 Overview

The Middle East and North Africa are 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 in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other violent extremist groups, the vast number of refugees that are flowing into nearby regions, the prolonged crisis in Syria, the Middle East Peace Process, the tensions between countries in the region, 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, and Japan is working with the international community to resolve these issues.

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 the North Africa region (hereinafter, “countries in the Middle East”) that have centered on the resources and energy sectors. Today, however, beyond these relationships, Japan works to build

more multi-layered ones including wide-ranging economic cooperation, politics and security, and culture and people-to-people exchanges. Specifically, Prime Minister Abe has visited this region seven times since the inauguration of the second Abe administration in December 2012. Foreign Minister Kono has also visited the region eight times since taking his current position in August 2017. High-level visits, meetings, and talks are also held actively.

In particular, Foreign Minister Kono has given strong commitment to this region as one of six pillars of Japan’s foreign policy. The “Kono Four Principles¹” that he set forth at the first Japan-Arab Political Dialogue held in Egypt in September 2017 forms the basic principles of his Middle East policy. The four principles are: (1) intellectual and human contribution, (2) investment in people, (3) enduring efforts, and (4) enhancing political efforts. Based on the “Kono Four Principles,” Japan provides support for the Middle East Peace Process and dialogues to resolve issues in Syria and other countries. As a part of its efforts to support Palestine, Japan is also advancing the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative and the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD) (See Special Feature “Japan’s Support

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>

for Palestine (JAIP, CEAPAD)²). In April 2018, the Senior Officials Meeting on Supporting Job Creation and Vocational Training to Facilitate Weapons Reduction for Iraqi Society² was held with an aim of stabilizing Iraq after the withdrawal of ISIL (post-ISIL). At the IISS Manama Dialogue held in October, which Foreign Minister Kono attended for the second consecutive year, he emphasized that Japan will make use of its experiences to support reform efforts by the Middle East countries through human resource development and other means. Japan will make full use of its friendly relations with the Middle East countries and its alliance with the U.S. to continue implementing its own initiatives toward realizing peace and stability in the Middle East.

Although the area controlled by ISIL has decreased significantly in size, the Syrian crisis remains unresolved. Since the beginning of the crisis in Syria, Japan has provided support worth more than 2.5 billion US dollars in total to Syria and its neighboring countries, including support to Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, which have been affected by an influx of Syrian refugees. Japan will continue to provide humanitarian support for all Syrians who need it, while supporting the Syrian political process led by the United Nations.

2 Situation in Middle East Region

(1) Iraq

Elections for the Council of Representatives were held in May 2018, which was the first national elections held after the declaration of the liberation of all Iraqi territories from ISIL in December last year (the previous elections were held in April 2014). Thereafter, President Salih was elected in October, and a new government headed by Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi was inaugurated in the same month. (However, as of the time



Senior Officials Meeting on Supporting Job Creation and Vocational Training to Facilitate Weapons Reduction for Iraqi Society (April 5; Tokyo. Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)

of the inauguration of the government, eight ministers out of 22 had not yet been approved.) In the Kurdistan region as well, regional parliament elections were held in September (previously held in September 2013), and the Kurdistan political parties coordinated among themselves toward the formation of a new regional government body.

With the aim of providing support for Iraq's recovery process, Japan continues to contribute to infrastructural reconstruction in the country through yen-loan projects in areas such as water and electricity supply. Furthermore, in Iraq, the return of a large number of internally displaced persons arising as a result of the operations to liberate Iraq from ISIL have become an issue of the highest priority for recovery. In 2018, following up from the previous year, Japan provided support of 100 million US dollars via international organizations, with the aim of realizing the early return and settlement of the displaced persons. Meanwhile, five Iraqi parliamentary members and others visited Japan in February to participate in "Seminar to Share Japan's Experiences and Knowledge" to utilize Japan's experiences for reconstruction and national reconciliation.

With regard to the security matter, ISIL fighters are still hiding in Iraq and engaging in sporadic terrorist activities. And since July, there have been demonstrations by residents in the southern part of Iraq, particularly in Basra Governorate, protesting

² April 2018, Senior Officials Meeting on Supporting Job Creation and Vocational Training to Facilitate Weapons Reduction for Iraqi Society (Outcomes)
URL : https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/press4_005884.html

against the shortage of water and electricity and demanding improvements in public services. In September, the Consulate General of Iran in Basra was set on fire by demonstrators. Although the demonstration calmed down later, dissatisfaction of the residents of the Basra Governorate and other areas remains unsolved, which continues to be a challenge for the new government.

As for Japan-Iraq relations, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Sato attended the International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq held in Kuwait in February, where he expressed Japan's continuous support to Iraq. The Senior Officials Meeting on Supporting Job Creation and Vocational Training to Facilitate Weapons Reduction for Iraqi Society was held jointly by the governments of Iraq and Japan in April, with the attendance of Prime Minister Abe and Prime Minister Abadi. During the meeting, Prime Minister Abe advocated international support for the Iraqi government's efforts under a new approach of integrating security and development initiatives. In December, Special Adviser to the Prime Minister Sonoura visited Iraq, where he conveyed Prime Minister Abe's congratulations on the formation of the new government and affirmed that efforts will be made to promote exchanges between the two countries in 2019, which marks the 80th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Iraq.

(2) Syria

A Situation

The ongoing Syrian crisis, which began in 2011, has resulted in the deaths of as many as about 500,000 people as well as created more than 5 million refugees and approximately 6.3 million internally displaced persons. It is considered to be this century's worst humanitarian crisis.

Although the power of ISIL has diminished considerably, the Syrian government strengthened its offensive against dissidents in 2018. In April, the East Ghouta district in the eastern part of

Damascus was suppressed by Syrian Government Forces, while the northern part of Homs and the southwestern parts of Syria including Daraa were suppressed by the same Forces in May and July, respectively. Amidst concerns of a possible large-scale attack by the Syrian government in the Idlib Governorate in the northwestern part of Syria, a Russia-Turkey Summit Meeting was held in Sochi, Russia, on September 17. During this meeting, the leaders agreed on designating a non-militarized zone in the areas around Idlib, among other matters. As a result of this agreement, a large-scale attack by the Syrian government on Idlib has been avoided for the time being; however, there have been reports that forces opposing to the Russia-Turkey agreement are present among the dissidents in this region, making the situation extremely unpredictable as it is not known how long the agreement would last.

In response to the use of chemical weapons in April amidst the strengthening offensive by the Syrian government in the East Ghouta district, the U.S., the UK, and France carried out a missile attack on April 14.

Furthermore, in January 2018, Turkey, which was concerned about the expansion of Kurdish influence in Syria, launched an operation in Afrin in the northwestern part of Syria that is under the control of Kurdish forces. In March, it successfully suppressed the area. Thereafter, although the U.S. and Turkey reached an agreement in June to withdraw Kurdish forces from Manbij, President Erdogan of Turkey announced on December 12 the start of military operations in the regions east of the Euphrates in the northern part of Syria. Hence, the situation in North Syria remains fluid.

Meanwhile, multiple attacks within Syria by Israel have occurred as a result of Israel's concerns over the growing influence of Iran and Hezbollah in Syria. On December 19, President Trump announced that the U.S. military, which had until then been providing support for the Syrian Democratic Forces and engaging in military operations against ISIL, would be withdrawn from Syria.

B Political Process

On January 30, 2018, a wide range of Syrian nationals, armed groups, religious groups, and others were invited to the Syria National Dialogue Congress held in Sochi, Russia, and an agreement was reached on the establishment of a Constitutional Committee to discuss revisions to the constitution. Although the members of this Committee were later selected through the mediation of a special representative from the UN, it ran into difficulties and failed to obtain the agreement of the parties involved. No progress has since been made in the political process.

C 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 2.5 billion US dollars to Syria and neighboring countries from 2012 to the end of 2018 for humanitarian assistance. 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.

After taking office, U.S. President Trump has adopted the stance that Iran's activities to



Japan-Iran Summit Meeting (September 26, New York, U.S.; Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)

destabilize the region should be dealt with strictly. In May 2018, President Trump announced that the U.S. will withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreed in July 2015 between Iran and the EU3 (UK, France, Germany and EU) +3 (U.S., China and Russia), and begin reinstating U.S. sanctions on Iran, which had been suspended according to the JCPOA. The U.S. reinstated some sanctions on Iran in August, and in November, the U.S. fully reinstated sanctions on Iran, including in areas such as crude oil imports and others. 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 even after the announcement by the U.S. on its withdrawal from the JCPOA.

Japan supports the JCPOA, which contributes to strengthening the international non-proliferation system and the stability of the Middle East. To support the fulfillment of Iran's commitment to the JCPOA, Japan conducted a group training on nuclear safety for employees of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran in February, as well as a group training on safeguards for employees of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran in July in cooperation with the IAEA.

After the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA, Japan made the request to the U.S. on successive occasions, including four Japan-US consultations, that sanctions re-imposed by the U.S. on Iran

should not cause an adverse impact on the stable supply of energy to Japan and the activities of Japanese corporations. In November, the U.S. announced that the “significant reduction exception” provision will be applied to Japan under the National Defense Authorization Act.

At the UN General Assembly held in September, the seventh Japan-Iran Summit Meeting (New York, U.S.) was held since the Rouhani administration came into power. Prime Minister Abe stated that Japan has been engaged in cooperation that benefits the people of Iran in areas such as environment, health, and disaster risk reduction, and expressed his hopes to further develop the traditional friendly relations between the two countries in 2019, which marks the 90th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Iran. At the same time, he reiterated Japan’s support for the JCPOA. In Iran-Japan Foreign Ministers’ meetings held on three occasions (April, August, and November) and telephone meeting (May), the foreign ministers of Japan and Iran exchanged frank opinions on the JCPOA and the situation in the Middle East, including Yemen and Syria.

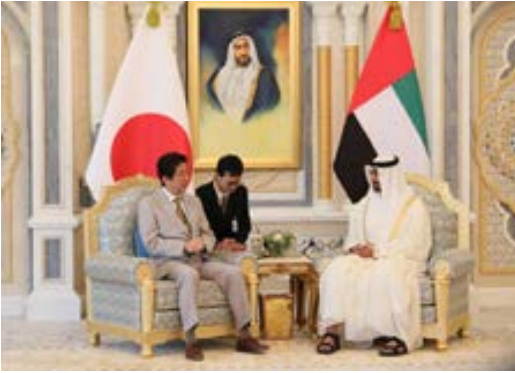
(4) Gulf States (including Yemen)

The Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain) are important partners for Japan from the perspective of Japan’s energy security. At the same time, industry diversification and human resources development toward ending reliance on oil have been positioned as their priority issues, and Japan is cooperating with the Gulf States toward the realization of these goals. A good example is the “Japan-Saudi Vision 2030” that can be described as a new compass for bilateral cooperation based on the “Saudi Vision 2030” announced by Saudi Arabia in 2016 and which aims to create employment and end dependence on oil.

In 2018, there were visits to Japan by H. E. Mr.

Marzouq Ali Mohammad Thenayan Al-Ghanim, Speaker of the National Assembly of the State of Kuwait in March, H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates in April, H.E. Mr. Khalid Al-Falih, Minister of Energy, Industry and Mineral Resources of Saudi Arabia, H.E. Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Minister of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage in May, and H.E. Dr. Yahya bin Said bin Abdullah Al Jabri, Chairman of the Special Economic Zone Authority at Al Duqm (SEZAD) in September. From Japan, Prime Minister Abe visited the UAE in April, where he proposed bilateral cooperation across a wide range of sectors beyond energy. Foreign Minister Kono visited Bahrain in October to attend the IISS Manama Dialogue and Qatar in December to attend the Doha Forum 2018. This was the second consecutive year that Foreign Minister Kono attended the Manama Dialogue. In 2017, he spoke about Japan’s active role toward stabilizing the Middle East region through the “Kono Four Principles” that represent Japan’s Middle East diplomacy policy. In 2018, he expressed that Japan will provide support for reforms in Middle East countries by harnessing Japan’s experience and expertise from the process of its own modernization (in particular, in the areas of education, human resource development, and the empowerment of youths). Foreign Minister Kono’s attendance at the Doha Forum 2018 also marked the first attendance for a Japanese foreign minister. During the forum, he emphasized the importance of working together in order to address common issues shared by countries around the world. Furthermore, Special Adviser to the Prime Minister Sonoura visited Oman in September and engaged in consultations focused on the energy, tourism, and defense sectors. Hence, Japan held active exchanges with key officials from the Gulf States in 2018.

With regard to the regional situation, the severance of diplomatic relations by Saudi Arabia,



Prime Minister Abe's visit to United Arab Emirates (April 30, Abu Dhabi, UAE; Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)



Speech by Foreign Minister Kono at the Plenary Session, "Stabilisation and Reconstruction in the Middle East," at the 14th IISS Manama Dialogue (October 27, Manama, Bahrain)

UAE, Bahrain, Egypt and other countries with Qatar in June 2017 remains in a deadlock despite diplomatic mediation by Sheikh Al Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait and consultations at the summit meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in December.

In response to the release of a Japanese journalist detained in Syria in October with cooperation from the Qatar government, Prime Minister Abe expressed gratitude to Sheikh Tamim, Amir Al Thani of the State of Qatar, while Foreign Minister Kono expressed gratitude to Sheikh Mohammed, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar.

During the same month, a Saudi Arabian journalist was assassinated at the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Istanbul, and condemnation of Saudi Arabia by the West over this incident spread quickly.

Fighting continues in Yemen between the Houthis, anti-government forces that control the capital Sanaa, the Yemeni military, and the military of the Arab League. Despite a ceasefire agreement concluded in Hudaydah, port city in the western part of Yemen in December, the outlook for peace remains uncertain. In terms of developments in the past year, operations were launched by the military of the Arab League in June to recapture Hudaydah. Amidst the deterioration of humanitarian conditions in Hudaydah as a result of the intensification of battles in the city, the U.S. has called for a ceasefire and there is growing momentum toward peace. In December, talks were held between the parties concerned in Stockholm, Sweden, and an agreement was reached on a ceasefire in Hudaydah.

Yemen faces a serious humanitarian crisis that includes food shortage and a lack of medical and health services, and support from the international community is needed. From January 2015 to December 2018, Japan provided assistance worth more than 200 million US dollars through cooperation with international organizations and other agencies. Japan will continue to provide support toward realizing stability in Yemen.

(5) Israel

Israel excels in the development of advanced technology and innovation and holds importance for the Japanese economy. It also plays an important role in the stability of the Middle East region. In recent years, Israel has been expanding its relationship with Asia, including Japan, as a part of its efforts to diversify its diplomacy. As a result, the cooperative relations between Japan and Israel has been strengthened exponentially, particularly in the economic front. Compared to 2013, the number of Japanese businesses in Israel has increased threefold, while the amount of investment has increased by 120 times. The Embassy of Japan in Israel opened the Japan Innovation Center in June under its auspices,



Japan-Israel Summit Meeting (May 2, Jerusalem, Israel; Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)

and is engaged in providing active support for developing relationships between Japanese and Israeli corporations.

On May 2, Prime Minister Abe visited Israel for the first time in three years. During the visit, he held a meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu, welcomed the development of economic relations with Israel in recent years, and affirmed Japan's intention to advance cooperation including in the areas of politics and security. Thereafter, the two countries held their first Politico-Military (PM) Dialogue in October and the Fourth Dialogue on Cyber Issues as well as Bilateral Consultation on Disarmament and Non-proliferation Issues in November. From 2017 to 2018 alone, eight ministers from Israel visited Japan, and active intergovernmental dialogues are taking place between the two countries in a wide range of areas.

(6) Palestine

Based on the Oslo Accords of 1993 and other agreements, the Palestinian National Authority (PA) began self-government rule in the West Bank and Gaza from 1995. Prime Minister Abbas assumed office as President after the presidential elections held in January 2005. After that, however, relations between the Fatah led by President Abbas and Hamas deteriorated, and Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip by military

force. Through Egypt's mediation efforts, Fatah and Hamas reached an agreement in-principle in October 2017 to transfer power in the Gaza Strip to the PA. However, the agreement has not been implemented and the division remains, with the West Bank still held by Fatah and the Gaza Strip remaining effectively under Hamas control.

On May 1, 2018, Prime Minister Abe visited Palestine for the first time in three years and met with President Abbas. During the meeting, they exchanged views on a wide range of topics related to the Middle East Peace Process, and Prime Minister Abe expressed that Japan will continue to support Palestine in this time of difficulty. The next day, Prime Minister Abe visited the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park (JAIP), the flagship project of the "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" initiative led by Japan, and inspected the steady progress of Japan's support efforts.

(7) 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.

The U.S. Trump administration announced in December 2017 its position recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moved the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem on May 14, 2018. In response, demonstrations were held by protestors in Palestine, and in the Gaza Strip, more than 50 people died while many were injured as a result of violent clashes with Palestinians and Israeli security forces. After that, tensions have erupted intermittently, such as clashes in the Gaza Strip, the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip, and air strikes by Israeli forces on Hamas bases.

Japan's Assistance for Palestine (JAIP, CEAPAD)

Japan has been implementing unique initiatives concerning peace and stability in the Middle East with the aim of fostering trust among the parties involved, including the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative and the Conference on the Cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD). The Corridor for Peace and Prosperity is a plan developed in 2006 that seeks to promote economic autonomy for Palestine with regional cooperation by Japan, Palestine, Israel, and Jordan as a longer-term initiative. CEAPAD is a framework for regional discussions launched by Japan in February 2013 to support Palestine’s nation building by mobilizing East Asia’s knowledge and experience with economic advancement.

Below are introductions to Jericho Agro-Industrial Park (JAIP), a flagship project of the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative, and CEAPAD.

1. JAIP

JAIP is a project to build an agro-industrial park as an operational base for Palestinian small and medium enterprises in the suburbs of Jericho. As of December 2018, 13 Palestinian companies are operating at the park (including companies producing supplements made from olive leaf extract, paper towels, soaps, beverages, and other daily goods) and have created about 200 jobs. Another 19 companies have tenancy contracts.

Prime Minister Abe visited JAIP in May 2018. Prior to that, Foreign Minister Kono visited JAIP in December 2017 to attend an opening ceremony of Phase 2 and announced plans to expand the scope of JAIP to include the ICT sector, as well as the facilitation of logistics, as a grade-up strategy of the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative. The project is currently under Phase 2 of the three planned phases. Palestine held an ICT business competition in October 2018 and Japan invited five top competition participants to Japan in December.



Visit by Prime Minister Abe to JAIP (May 2, Jericho, Palestine; Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)

2. CEAPAD

A ministerial meeting, which was chaired by Foreign Minister Kono and attended by ASEAN countries, the Republic of Korea, and others, took place in Thailand in June 2018. In the meeting, the ministers confirmed areas for future assistance for Palestine and reconfirmed the importance of the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Foreign Minister Kono introduced JAIP products at the meeting.

Additionally, Japan arranged a tour of Palestine with ambassadors from CEAPAD member countries (Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, etc.) and visited JAIP and UNWRA refugee camps in October 2018. Participating countries commented that it was “a very informative visit” and expressed gratitude for Japan’s initiative, particularly since some participating countries do not have diplomatic relations with Israel.



Foreign Minister Kono introducing JAIP products at the CEAPAD ministerial meeting (June 27, Bangkok, Thailand)



Palestinian Prime Minister Hamdallah, ministers, and a group of ambassadors and others of countries participating in the tour (October 11, Jericho, Palestine)

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 Palestine to coexist in peace.

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, such as the visit by Prime Minister Abe to Israel and Palestine in May 2018. Furthermore, through Japan's unique initiative, the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” (See Japan's Assistance for Palestine (JAIP, CEAPAD),” invitational programs from Israel and Palestine to Japan, and other means, Japan is working for confidence building between the parties concerned and has contributed to creating an environment that is vital toward the realization of peace. In particular, with regard to the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative, Foreign Minister Kono held a meeting of the Four-Party Consultative Unit with Israel, Palestine, and Jordan in April 2018 in Jordan. Japan also took the lead in the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD), which aims to harness the experience and resources of Asian countries to support Palestine, and a CEAPAD ministerial meeting was held in Bangkok, Thailand, in June.

(8) 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 held a summit meeting with His Majesty King Abdullah II during his visit to Jordan in May. Foreign Minister Kono visited Jordan in April when he served as the co-chair for the Aqaba Process Meeting, which is held to discuss counter-terrorism measures. He visited Jordan again in December and held the first Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue. From Jordan, Minister of Foreign Affairs Safadi visited Japan in March, and His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein and Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah visited Japan in November. Hence, there were more frequent summit meetings and ministerial level visits, and the traditionally favorable relations between Japan and Jordan have evolved further into a strategic partnership. 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, and in 2018, continued to contribute to its social and economic stability through the signing of exchange of notes and exchanges of letters concerning Development Policy Loans for reforms of the business environment, employment, and fiscal sustainability.

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



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

was inaugurated in December of the same year. A range of policies are being implemented by the Hariri Cabinet, and in particular, a new electoral law was passed in June 2017. A parliamentary election, Lebanon's first parliamentary election since 2009, was held peacefully in May 2018 in accordance with this law. Although Prime Minister Hariri was nominated as prime minister, coordination between the sects met with difficulty, so a Cabinet has not yet been formed.

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.

(9) Turkey

Turkey is a geopolitically important large country in the region. As a member state of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (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 1890³.

In the Presidential election held on June 24, 2018, President Erdogan was re-elected with 52.59% of the votes (voting rate of 86.24%). In the parliamentary elections held at the same time, the ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) formed the People's Alliance and won 57.4% of the seats (344 out of 600 parliamentary seats). The AKP was unable to win more than half of the seats on its own.

As a result of these elections, Turkey moved from a parliamentary cabinet system to an executive



Japan-Turkey Foreign Ministers' Meeting (November 5, Tokyo)

presidential system, in which the authority is concentrated on the president. The ministries were also reorganized with the abolishment of the prime minister position, and reduction in the number of cabinet minister positions from 26 to 17 and the number of ministries from 22 to 16. A new Vice President position was also established.

The state of emergency declared by the government after an attempted coup d'état on July 15, 2016, was lifted in July 2018.

On the diplomatic front, Turkey has accepted approximately 3.3 million Syrian refugees while tensions with countries in Europe and North America are rising over response to the refugee issue. With regard to the Syrian situation, Turkey is cooperating with Russia and Iran on, among other things, the creation of de-escalation zones through the Astana Process. Turkey also carried out Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch and is advancing into Syria to ensure the security of the country. Tensions had risen with the U.S. over the issues of the extradition of Fethullah Gulen, residing in the U.S., the provision by the U.S. of weaponry to the PYD and YPG (organizations that are active in Syria in connection with the PKK, a Turkish terrorist organization involved in the Kurdish independence movement), and Turkey's purchase of the S400 anti-aircraft missile system from Russia. Turkey-U.S. relations were further aggravated by its treatment of

³ For more details of the Ertugrul Frigate incident, refer to: http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle_e/turkey/data.html

Andrew Brunson, an American pastor detained in Turkey for his support of groups in relation to the attempted coup d'état, and escalated to the reciprocal imposition of sanctions between Turkey and the U.S., such as additional tariffs. As a result, the Turkish Lira plummeted in August. After that, Brunson was released in October, and the Lira gradually recovered. Tensions between the two countries are easing gradually.

With regard to the relations with Japan, a summit meeting was held in New York, U.S., in September, and in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in December. Foreign Ministers' meetings were held in Singapore and Tokyo in August and November respectively.

(10) Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, the Ghani administration is mounting an effort for peace; among other achievements, it realized a temporary three-day ceasefire in June for the first time in history with the anti-government organization, the Taliban. Various countries, including the U.S., are also taking proactive action toward bringing about peace in the country, but none of these efforts have yet culminated in a peace agreement, and close attention is being paid to future trends. Lower house elections were held on October 20 for the first time in eight years. Although the realization of an election amidst the unstable security conditions should, in itself, be commended, there were also challenges such as equipment breakdown at some voting centers that made it impossible for voting to be carried out there. The Geneva Conference on Afghanistan was held on November 28, and attended by State Minister for Foreign Affairs Sato as the Japanese representative. At the conference, the international community called for Afghanistan to undertake further reforms on corruption and other areas, while also expressing its continued support toward the country. Afghanistan, on its part, expressed its will to carry out reforms and presented an action plan for peace.

(11) 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 in the region, and 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.

Steady progress is seen in the Japan-Egypt relations. 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 Japan, and strengthening support for the Egypt-Japan University of Science and Technology (E-JUST).

Active high-level visits were also carried out between Japan and Egypt in 2018. There were visits to Japan by Minister of Education Shawkī in February and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Abdel Ghaffar in October. Furthermore, during the visit by Foreign Minister Shoukry to Japan in October, he held the Japan-Egypt Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue with Foreign Minister Kono. From Japan, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Manabu Horii visited Egypt in March.

The number of Japanese tourists visiting Egypt is on the rise. In December, direct flights between Japan and Egypt, which resumed last year, increased to two flights a week. Bilateral investments and exchanges are expected to grow accordingly.

3 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 this potential. On the other hand, as 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. Three parallel political forces continue to exist 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 May 2018, a four-party talk was realized under the leadership of France, between Prime Minister Sarraj of the Government of National Accord, Field Marshal Haftar of the Libyan National Army, Speaker of the House of Representatives Saleh, and head of the High State Council Mishri. Although the decision was made to hold an election in December, this was never brought to fruition. Furthermore, a summit-level international meeting was held in December under Italy's leadership, and the importance of convening a General National Congress at the start of the year, as announced by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) Salamé, was affirmed. There are plans to hold a citizens' referendum concerning the constitution in February 2019, and it is expected that the elections process will start. The security situation in Libya remains unstable. In August 2018, military conflict led by militia broke out in Tripoli, causing fatalities and injuries among civilians as well. It is hoped that, for the sake of stability within Libya and in neighboring countries, progress will be made with comprehensive political dialogue by Libyans, and



Japan-Morocco Foreign Ministers' Meeting (December 24, Rabat, Morocco)

that a legitimate national unity government can be established.

In December 2018, Foreign Minister Kono visited Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. These were the first visits by a Japanese Foreign Minister, in the context of bilateral relations in 31 years, 15 years, and eight years respectively. These three countries have maintained political stability after the “Arab Spring” and hold strong potential as a region for its geographical advantages and abundant young labor force. At the same time, however, they face economic and social risks such as disparity among regions and high unemployment rates. Foreign Minister Kono's visit promotes cooperation toward economic and social stability, as well as the enhancement of security and counter-terrorism measures, all of which are issues shared by the countries. At the same time, he affirmed efforts to develop frameworks for promoting business and to strengthen political dialogues, in order to further strengthen Japan's partnership with each country.

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. It also hosted the Assembly of the African Union (AU) in July 2018 in its capital, Nouakchott. Located in sub-Saharan Africa, Mauritania is also the westernmost Arabic country.