
F. THE MIDDLE EAST

(a) Afghanistan

Civil war in Afghanistan among rival warlords broke out in 1989, when the Soviet army withdrew after having occupied portions of the country since 1979. Around the end of 1994 a new force known as the Taliban (which means “students of God”) emerged. The Taliban rapidly gained support among the Afghan people, who had grown sick of war, and expanded the areas under their control. By the summer of 1999, the Taliban had secured control of over 90 percent of Afghanistan including the capital Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Bamiyan, famed for its ancient stone Buddhist statues (the other 10 percent remained under the effective control of the Northern Alliance). The United Nations (UN) Security Council made a series of resolutions instituting sanctions against the Taliban regime for harboring Usama bin Laden, supporting terrorism, and cultivating narcotics, and the Taliban had been effectively isolated from the international community. In February 2001, the Taliban issued an edict interpreting statutory as anti-Islamic and ordered the destruction of all statues within the country. In the middle of March, the renowned Buddhist relics of Bamiyan were destroyed.

Following the September 11 terrorist attacks, the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries labeled Usama bin Laden a terrorist ringleader and initiated an armed offensive against his Al-Qaeda organization and against the Taliban, which supported it. The Taliban withdrew from Kabul in November and had lost virtually all of their bases within Afghanistan by December.

Once the Taliban had lost effective control of Afghanistan, representatives of Afghan factions attended the UN Talks on Afghanistan, which was held on December 5 near Bonn, Germany, in line with a proposal submitted by UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan Lakhdar Brahimi. The representatives attending the conference adopted the Bonn Agreement, which stipulated that an Interim Authority would be launched on December 22; that an Emergency Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) would be convened by former King Mohammad Zaher Shah within six months from that date to determine the details on the transitional administration; that a Loya Jirga to ratify the constitution would be convened within 18 months after the Transitional Authority was established; and that a fair and free election based on the new constitution would be held within two years after the Emergency Loya Jirga. As a result of the Bonn Agreement, Senior Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Shigeo Uetake was dispatched to Afghanistan on December 22 to attend the Inauguration Ceremony of the Afghan

Interim Authority and to recognize the Afghan Interim Authority on behalf of the Japanese government.

Japan believes it is important that Afghanistan establish stable government and make steady progress in its reconstruction efforts, to ensure that the country never again becomes a hotbed of terrorism and thus a destabilizing factor in the region. Accordingly, Japan has played an active role in formulating a road map for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. It hosted the Senior Officials Meeting on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan together with the United States in Washington, D.C., on November 20. The meeting led to the subsequent Afghan Reconstruction Steering Group (ARSG) Conference held in Brussels on December 20 and 21, and finally culminated in the International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan held in Tokyo on January 21 and 22, 2002.

Column

The Dynamism of the Afghan Conflict

Politics in Afghanistan are extremely dynamic. Afghanistan is a country where the political situation can completely change overnight.

The 23-year conflict in Afghanistan began when Communist Party forces took over the country in a coup d'état in Kabul on April 27, 1978. Soviet forces then invaded for a year and a half, and the conflict progressed rapidly, like a boulder tumbling down a steep slope. The fruits of the recent United Nations Talks on Afghanistan (the Bonn Meeting) are also emerging amid a harsh tempest of political change.

On September 7, 2001, an old friend who was a trusted assistant to Northern Alliance Commander Ahmad Shah Masood made a surprise visit to my office. We were delighted to see each other again, and we talked for more than three hours, sharing opinions about the conditions prevailing then in Afghanistan and about ways of resolving the conflict. Our discussions focused mainly on how to bring the conflict to an end, and on ways to persuade a disinterested international community to get involved and support conflict-resolution efforts. My friend listened as I expressed my view that, given the military and political stalemate, a staged effort would be the only appropriate approach. He said he would convey that view to Commander Masood, and, promising to meet again, we parted.

Just two days later, on the evening of September 9, I learned that Commander Masood had met with some sort of disaster, and no one knew if he was alive or dead. I also learned that my friend was also missing. I picked up the telephone to make a call on my satellite phone in an effort to confirm his situation. I felt a strong premonition that a major change had occurred in the Afghanistan conflict. I imagined a horrible scenario whereby Commander Masood's death would lead to the total collapse of the Northern Alliance, Taliban domination over the entire country, and a massive exodus of Afghan refugees into Tajikistan. In fact, the Northern Alliance denied that Commander Masood had been assassinated, and they made earnest efforts to ensure that the battle lines were held. But to me it seemed only a matter

(b) Iraq

Iraq has been under UN economic sanctions ever since it invaded Kuwait in August 1990. In December 1999, UN Security Council Resolution 1284 was adopted in response to the continued refusal of the Iraqi government to cooperate with UN inspection activities. This comprehensive resolution established a new committee, the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Committee (UNMOVIC), to address the disposal of weapons of mass destruction. The resolution also agreed to the suspension of the economic sanctions for 120 days if Iraq cooperates in all respects with the UNMOVIC and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for 120 days. Japan believes it is extremely important for Iraq to cooperate with the UNMOVIC and to comply with all the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, in order to achieve peace and stability in the Gulf region, which is the source of approximately 80 percent of Japan's oil imports; and together with other UN member countries, Japan has been

of time before Commander Masood's assassination was confirmed and an avalanche of Taliban forces would break through the Northern Alliance lines and invade their territory. I firmly believed that the end of the conflict under nationwide Taliban control was now a virtual certainty, and my only remaining question was when the Northern Alliance would completely collapse.

At that very juncture, the situation in Afghanistan was transformed in an instant with the September 11 Al-Qaeda suicide terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and on other locations. As it turned out, those attacks reversed the political and military balance between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Northern Alliance was suddenly rejuvenated. The international community came to view the Taliban, who were protecting Al-Qaeda, as the enemy and began providing the Northern Alliance with military support. In just a few short days, these dramatic events eliminated any possibility that my terrible scenario would come to pass. Commander Masood had been racking his brains to figure out how to draw the attention of the international community, and in a strange twist of irony that goal was finally accomplished by his death and by the deaths of many innocent people half way around the world.

The conflict in Afghanistan is so dynamic that it can be likened to a political storm in which one can never let down one's guard, a whirlwind that can change course overnight, a wild horse out of control. I feel it is the solemn duty of Japan and the international community to learn how to ride this horse, to prevent any further dramatic political upheaval, and to lead the country down the path to peace.

Hiroshi Takahashi
Head of the Political Affairs Division,
United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMIA)

urging Iraq to comply with these UN resolutions. In February 2001, Iraq and the United Nations held a dialogue aimed at resolving these issues, but to date the Iraqi government has refused to cooperate with the UNMOVIC and has remained under UN economic sanctions.

With the prolongation of UN economic sanctions, an increasingly serious humanitarian situation has emerged in Iraq, including shortages of food and medicine. To cope with this, the “Oil for Food” program has been in place since December 1996 in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. This program allows Iraq to export its petroleum under UN monitoring to fund the purchase of humanitarian supplies, and its implementation has led to some improvement in the living conditions of the Iraqi people. Moreover, since May 2001, the UN Security Council has been reviewing the economic sanctions, looking toward introducing measures that would limit the effect of the sanctions on the general public in Iraq while still further reinforcing their effectiveness in the area of arms control. Japan believes it is inappropriate for the economic sanctions to cause suffering among the Iraqi public at large, and it supports the ongoing review of the economic sanctions by the UN Security Council.

(c) Iran

In the eighth presidential elections, held in June 2001, President Seyyed Mohammad Khatami stood for re-election amid fierce opposition from conservative forces opposed to his reform policy (some reform-minded activists were arrested), but he emerged victorious with even greater support from the Iranian people (77 percent of the vote) than he had gained in the previous election. Nevertheless, the confrontations between conservatives and reformists have continued even since the second Khatami administration was launched in August, and some reformist members of parliament were summoned to appear before the courts.

In its foreign diplomacy, following the September terrorist attacks in the United States, Iran worked even more actively than in the past to strengthen its relations with other countries. President Khatami held frequent telephone consultations with the leaders of European and Middle Eastern states. In September, U.K. Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Jack Straw became the first British foreign secretary to visit Iran since the revolution. The foreign ministers of Italy and Germany both visited Iran in October, and Foreign Secretary Straw visited again in November. In terms of Iran’s relations with the United States, the U.S. Congress in August extended the Iran–Libya Sanctions Act for an additional five years. Following the terrorist attacks in the United States, Iran demonstrated a positive stance toward cooperating with the U.S. military action in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, there have been no evident signs of major progress in Iran–U.S. bilateral relations since that time. In Iran’s relations with Russia, President Khatami visited that country in March, and in October Iran and Russia concluded a military cooperation pact.

Japan believes it is important for Iran, which has great influence in the Middle East region, to play a more positive role for peace and stability in the Middle East and the whole world by further advancing its reforms, conducting dialogue with the international community, and pursuing détente policies. Based on this view, Japan has utilized various opportunities to urge Iran to pursue such efforts. In October, following the terrorist attacks in the United States, Masahiko Koumura visited Iran as a special envoy for Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to hold meetings with government leaders, and he stressed that the international community must unite as one in the fight against terrorism. In November, Minister of Foreign Affairs Seyyed Kamal Kharrazi visited Japan and exchanged opinions with Japanese leaders on cooperation in the fight against terrorism and also on peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

Japan also recognizes, from the economic point of view, the importance of maintaining and further developing its relations with Iran, which is one of Japan's major oil suppliers. Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh visited Japan in February, and Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Takeo Hiranuma visited Iran in July. Furthermore, the government dispatched the first economic mission to Iran since the revolution. These movements fostered a more forward-looking atmosphere conducive to the expansion of bilateral economic relations. There has also been an active exchange between Iranian and Japanese parliamentarians. Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Budget Hosei Norota visited Iran in August, and Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs Koichi Yoshida visited the country in November. In addition, a delegation of the Iran–Japan Parliamentary Friendship League visited Japan in October.

In bilateral women's exchange, in August Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs Kaori Maruya became the first female Japanese government representative to visit Iran since the revolution. Parliamentary Secretary Maruya met with female Iranian leaders and opened the door for further women's exchange between Japan and Iran.

(d) Gulf Countries

The year 2001 marked the 10th anniversary of the Gulf War and the liberation of Kuwait; but even now, after a decade has passed, the Gulf countries continue to rely upon the U.S. and other Western countries in order to preserve regional security, while carefully maintaining the political balance with Iran and Iraq. While giving due consideration to these regional conditions, Japan needs to develop its relations with the Gulf countries, as they can have a significant influence on the stability and prosperity of the international community; and Japan needs to work to maintain the stability of the Middle East region, which supplies the vast majority of Japan's energy resources.

In January 2001, Minister for Foreign Affairs Yohei Kono visited the Gulf countries of Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia

and announced an initiative entitled “Toward Multi-Layered Relations with the Gulf Countries,” also known as the Kono Initiative.²² This initiative calls for strengthening Japan’s diplomacy with the Gulf countries from a medium- and long-term perspective, and for building wide-ranging cooperative relations with the Gulf countries via personnel and cultural exchanges. The three main pillars of the Kono Initiative are the promotion of dialogue with the Islamic world, the development of water resources and environmental cooperation, and the promotion of a wide-ranging policy dialogue. To advance the Kono Initiative, lists were prepared toward establishing a network of eminent persons in Japan and the Islamic countries, a joint security seminar was held between Japan and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and in August Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs Maruya visited Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, and other Gulf countries in order to promote wide-ranging policy dialogue and to expand a women’s network among high-ranking government officials. In another notable development related to the deepening of relations between Japan and the Gulf countries, a Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force training squadron paid the first distant-voyage goodwill visit to the Gulf countries and engaged in exchange activities, mostly with young officers from each country.

Japan also believes that it is extremely important to reinforce its relations with the Gulf countries from the perspective of energy security. Japan remains highly dependent on the Gulf countries for its energy sources, and there are concerns regarding the problems with the renewal of Japan’s drilling rights in the region. In July, Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Hiranuma visited Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait and worked to strengthen Japan’s economic relations with the Gulf countries.

There is no doubt that with their abundant oil reserves the importance of the Gulf countries to the international economy will only increase in the future, and Japan must make positive efforts to further strengthen its comprehensive relations with the Gulf countries, beginning with activities that follow up on the Kono Initiative.

22. Minister for Foreign Affairs Kono called for deepening the dialogue among different religions, peoples, cultures, and civilizations in his foreign policy speeches and on numerous other occasions, as an appeal to the importance of promoting mutual understanding. As part of these efforts, research was conducted on means of promoting deeper mutual understanding between Japan and the Islamic countries, and Foreign Minister Kono announced the Kono Initiative during his January 2001 visit to the Gulf countries. The Initiative calls for the promotion of “dialogue with the Islamic world.”