

Section 7

The Middle East and North Africa

1 Overview

The Middle East and North Africa (the Middle East) is located in a geopolitically important area: the crossroads of Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia and South Asia. The region is a vital supplier of energy, representing approximately 50% of the world's oil reserves and 40% of the world's natural gas reserves and also a market with high potential, pursuing the diversification of economy and decarbonization, especially in the Gulf countries, against a backdrop of a high population growth rate.

Meanwhile, the region has gone through various conflicts and disputes along its history, and still faces a number of destabilizing factors and challenges. In recent years, regional tension is growing over Iran, and political turmoil continues in various regions since the "Arab Spring" in 2011. The civil war continues in Syria, resulting in a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons, and it has made a great impact on the stability of the entire region, including its neighboring countries. In Yemen, severe security and humanitarian conditions continue as the Houthis clash with the Yemeni Government and the Arab Coalition (led by Saudi Arabia and others, at the request of the Yemeni Government). The risk of the spread of violent extremism such as the "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL) also remains in some areas. On the other hand, there

were signs in 2020 that the situation is changing. The United Arab Emirates(UAE), Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco have agreed to normalize diplomatic relations with Israel, and in January 2021, severance of the diplomatic relations with Qatar, which had been ongoing since June 2017, was resolved.

The Biden administration of the U.S., inaugurated in January 2021, has announced that it will hold talks with Iran to return to the Iran nuclear deal, from which the previous administration had withdrawn. Regarding the Middle East Peace Process, the administration has worked on improving relations with Palestine. As such, the impact of various policies on the Middle East is drawing attention, and at the end of August 2021, the U.S. military ended its mission in Afghanistan after about 20 years.

Japan imports approximately 90% of its crude oil from the Middle East, and it is extremely important for Japan's peace and prosperity to promote peace and stability in the Middle East and to maintain and develop good relations with countries in the region. From this perspective, Japan in recent years has been striving to strengthen relations with Middle Eastern countries in a wide range of fields that include the economy, politics, security, culture and people-to-people exchanges. In August, Foreign Minister Motegi visited eight countries and regions in the Middle East, including Iraq, which was the first visit in 15 years for a Foreign Minister of Japan. As Japan has continued

its contribution to the peace and stability of the region and has earned the trust of each country, the Minister reiterated Japan's commitment to the Middle East and affirmed to work together closely for regional stability. Regarding Afghanistan, Japan has been providing humanitarian assistance and reaching out to the Taliban in cooperation with the international community since the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated in August 2021.

With infections of COVID-19 continuing to spread in the Middle East, Japan has provided ODA totaling about 2.9 billion Japanese yen to fight the virus. Japan has been introducing such assistance and the importance of addressing the issue based on the concept of human security, especially in vulnerable regions, as well as at international conferences at the ministerial level.

2 Situation in the Middle East

(1) Afghanistan

Peace negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban, which began in September 2020, was stalled without substantial progress, and the U.S. stepped up its efforts since the Biden administration took office to encourage peace on both the government and the Taliban sides. Based on the U.S.-Taliban agreement signed in February 2020, the Trump administration reduced the number of U.S. troops stationed in Afghanistan from 13,000 at the time of the agreement to 2,500 in January 2021, and on April 14, U.S. President Biden announced that the final withdrawal from Afghanistan would begin on May 1 and that U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces would fully withdraw by September 11 (in July, he announced that the withdrawal deadline would be moved up to the end of August). On the same day, NATO also announced its intention to complete the withdrawal of its troops within a few months. The Taliban, on the other hand, strongly objected asserting that the May 1 withdrawal deadline under the U.S.-Taliban agreement was postponed, and firmly refused to participate in

a peace conference scheduled for late April in Istanbul, Turkey. As such, the conference was not held.

As the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces progressed, the Taliban stepped up its offensive not only in its traditional stronghold of southern Afghanistan, but also in the provinces adjacent to the capital Kabul and primarily in the rural areas in the northern provinces. By July, the Taliban had also taken control of major border checkpoints with neighboring countries. Although there were efforts such as high-level talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, the Taliban launched a full-scale offensive into urban areas from late July, and fierce urban fighting also broke out in Kandahar and Lashkar Gah. On August 6, the Taliban seized control of the provincial capital of Nimruz province, and in a little more than a week, they took control of more than 30 provincial capitals, one after another. The Taliban then shocked the international community by entering the capital city of Kabul on August 15, far more quickly than observers expected. Although there was no large-scale fighting at this time, Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani left the country. Following the fall of Kabul, many countries decided to temporarily close their embassies, and the Japanese Embassy temporarily relocated to Istanbul where it continued its operations, including the protection of Japanese nationals.

After the Taliban seized Kabul, they announced that they would not take revenge on their opponents but would grant them amnesty, and that they would respect the rights of women within the framework of Islamic law. However, the sudden change in the situation caused great turmoil in the country, and many countries, especially Western countries that had deployed troops to Afghanistan, accelerated their efforts to evacuate their own citizens and local staff. Japan also dispatched its Self-Defense Force aircraft to transport one Japanese national and 14 Afghans who had requested evacuation. The U.S. completed the withdrawal of its forces on August 30, with President Biden

stating in a speech that “the United States ended 20 years of war in Afghanistan — the longest war in American history.”

In early September, the Taliban took control of Panjshir province, the last stronghold of the resistance, and announced the formation of a “transitional government,” but it has been noted that the government has no women and lacks inclusiveness. Also, terrorist attacks by groups affiliated with the “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL) targeting areas near Kabul airport in August and Shiite mosques in provincial cities in October have also been a source of instability in various parts of the country.

Against this backdrop, Japan has been working with the international community to affirm the importance of a united message to the Taliban and has been involved in the G7 Foreign and Development Ministers’ Meeting (August 19, Foreign Minister Motegi), the G7 Leaders’ Meeting (August 24, Prime Minister Suga), the Ministerial Meeting hosted by the U.S. (August 30, Foreign Minister Motegi), the Expanded Ministerial Meeting co-hosted by the U.S. and Germany (September 8, Foreign Minister Motegi), the UN Humanitarian Meeting (September 13, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Washio Eiichiro), the G20 Foreign Ministers’ Meeting (September 22, Foreign Minister Motegi), the G20 Leaders’ Meeting (October 12, Prime Minister Kishida), and other international meetings.

On September 1, Japan temporarily relocated the Embassy of Japan in Afghanistan to Doha,

Qatar, where the Taliban’s political office is located. Japan strongly urged the Taliban to ensure the safe departure of those who wish to leave the country, respect the rights of women and ethnic minorities and build an inclusive political system, through seizing opportunities such as the dispatch of Uemura Tsukasa, Representative of the Government of Japan, to Doha in September, and the visit of Okada Takashi, the Ambassador of Japan to Afghanistan, to Kabul in November 2021 and January 2022. As a result of these negotiations with the Taliban and diplomatic efforts, including through cooperation with the U.S., Qatar and other countries concerned, more than 500 Afghans (as of the end of January, 2022), including the local staff of Japanese embassy and other Japan-related organizations, have arrived in Japan with the support of the Japanese government since the situation deteriorated in Afghanistan.

The current humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is of great concern to the international community, which is also concerned about the damage to the economy caused by the “lack of liquidity” - the lack of sufficient cash and foreign currency circulating in the country. In October, Japan provided 65 million US dollars (approximately 7.1 billion Japanese yen) in emergency grant aid to Afghanistan and neighboring countries to support humanitarian needs such as shelter, food, health, water and sanitation, agriculture, and education via international organizations, and is currently providing humanitarian assistance. In December, Japan decided to provide an additional 109 million US dollars (approximately 11.8 billion Japanese yen) in the FY2021 supplementary budget. Japan intends to continue to provide assistance that stand with the people of Afghanistan and to contribute to ensuring stability in the region surrounding Afghanistan.

(2) Middle East Peace Process

A Developments surrounding the Middle East Peace Process

The Middle East Peace Process has stagnated



Prime Minister Kishida attends the G20 Summit video conference on Afghanistan (October, Tokyo)

since negotiations between Israel and Palestine faltered in April 2014. Since the inauguration of Biden administration of the U.S., there have been some signs of resumption of cooperation between the parties whose relations had deteriorated under the previous administration, but since mid-April 2021, Israeli security forces and Palestinian citizens clashed mainly in East Jerusalem and the situation became more severe. From May 10, rockets were fired intermittently from the Gaza Strip toward Israel, leading to an exchange of attacks with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), which launched counterattacks. By the time of the ceasefire on May 21, brokered by the countries concerned including the U.S. and Egypt, 260 Palestinians and 12 Israelis had been killed. After cease-fire positive movements have been observed such as the gradual resumption of high-level contacts between a new Israeli government established in June and the Palestinian Authority, but the conflict continues to smolder, especially in Gaza and East Jerusalem, and the situation remains tense and unstable.

B The Japanese Government's Efforts

In working toward achieving a “two-state solution” that would enable Israel and Palestine to coexist in peace, Japan, in cooperation with the international community, has actively contributed through the three pillars of political dialogue with stakeholders, confidence building among the concerned parties, and economic assistance for the Palestinians.

Immediately following the ceasefire in May, Japan held foreign ministers' telephone calls with Israel, Palestine, Egypt and Jordan to urge them to maintain the cease-fire and ease tensions. Since June, Japan has provided 23 million US dollars as humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, during Foreign Minister Motegi's visit to Israel and Palestine in August, he again encouraged officials from both sides to take concrete measures to ease tensions and restore trust.

As Japan's unique initiative, it has been promoting the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative, aiming at facilitating economic self-reliance of Palestine over the mid- and long-term through regional cooperation among Japan, Palestine, Israel and Jordan. As of the end of 2021, 18 Palestinian private companies are operating in the flagship Jericho Agro-Industrial Park (JAIP) project, creating approximately 200 jobs. In addition, Japan is mobilizing the resources and economic development knowledge of East Asian countries to support Palestinian nation building through the Conference on the Cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD).

(3) Israel

Israel excels in the development of advanced technology and innovation, and holds importance for the Japanese economy as well as for the stability of the Middle East. Israel attracted worldwide attention in 2021 as a leading country in COVID-19 vaccinations. The country became the first in the world in August to begin offering a third dose of vaccination to the general public.

In Israel, the general election held in March brought an end to the 12-year Netanyahu administration with the formation of a coalition government headed by Naftali Bennett of the Yamina party (religious right-wing party). Under the banner of change from the previous administration, the new government comprised a wide range of parties from the religious right to the secular left, and, for the first time in history, included an Arab



Japan-Israel Foreign Ministers' Meeting (August 2021, Tel Aviv)

party, the Ra'am party. The new government adopted a rotating prime minister system, with Bennett as prime minister and Yair Lapid, head of Yesh Atid (centrist), as alternate prime minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs until August 2023, and then until the end of his term in November 2025, with Lapid as Prime Minister and Bennett as Alternate Prime Minister and Interior Minister.

Regarding relations with Japan, Foreign Minister Motegi delivered a video message to the kickoff event of the Tohoku-Israel Startup Global Challenge Program with Alternate Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Lapid in July. In August, he visited Israel and exchanged views with President Isaac Herzog, Prime Minister Bennett, and Alternate Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Lapid.

(4) Palestine

Based on the 1993 Oslo Accords and other agreements, the Palestinian Authority (PA) began self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip from 1995. Prime Minister Abbas assumed office as president after the presidential elections held in January 2005. Following that, however, relations between the Fatah led by President Abbas and Hamas deteriorated, and Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip by military force. No progress has been made in the transfer of power to the PA in Gaza through Egypt's mediation efforts, which was agreed to in principle in October 2017, and the elections, such as that of the Palestinian Legislative Council, scheduled after May 2021 throughout Palestine, including Gaza, were also postponed on the grounds that Israel disagreed with the vote in East Jerusalem, and the division remains, with the West Bank of the Jordan River still held by Fatah and the Gaza Strip remaining under Hamas's de facto control.

Regarding relations with Japan, Foreign Minister Motegi visited Palestine in August and exchanged views with President Abbas, Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh, and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Riad Malki. In November,

Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Honda Taro participated in the "Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLIC) Ministerial Meeting" in the form of a video message, and expressed that Japan would continue to advance its efforts, such as the "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" initiative.

(5) Iran

Iran is a major Shiite regional power with a population of about 85 million that boasts abundant natural resources. Japan has developed a traditionally friendly relationship with Iran for more than 90 years. In recent years, bilateral cooperation has taken place in a wide range of areas, including medical and health care, environment, tourism and consular affairs, including the provision of COVID-19 vaccines.

As a result of Iran's presidential election that was held in June for the first time in four years, Ebrahim Raisi, a conservative Chief of the Judiciary of the Islamic Republic of Iran, won with 62% of the votes, and the Raisi administration was inaugurated in August. President Raisi prioritized measures to fight COVID-19 and the reconstruction of the domestic economy, which has been stagnant due to US economic sanctions, and is developing a foreign policy that emphasizes enhancing relations with neighboring countries in the Middle East and in Asia. Foreign Minister Motegi visited Iran immediately after President Raisi's inauguration in August. He was the first foreign dignitary from a major industrialized country and an Asian country to visit Iran and meet with President Raisi and other key officials of the new administration. They agreed to further strengthen and develop the relationship between the two countries.

Regarding the Iranian nuclear issue, since July 2019, Iran has taken steps that undermine its commitment to the Iran nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)), claiming that it has not received the expected economic benefits that would have been obtained by the JCPOA due to the U.S. withdrawal from

the deal by the former Trump administration and the subsequent resumption of sanctions on Iran by the U.S. Iran announced that it began producing 20% enriched uranium in January 2021, and in April it started producing uranium enriched up to 60%. Iran has also suspended implementation of the Additional Protocol, which allows for unannounced inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), among other things.

The Biden administration has announced that the U.S. is ready to return to the JCPOA, subject to Iran's strict compliance with the nuclear deal. Since April, talks between the U.S. and Iran have been held intermittently in Vienna, mediated by the European Union and other relevant countries, with the aim of returning to the nuclear deal. The talks were suspended following a change of government in Iran since June but resumed in November. However, negotiations have faced difficulties, and as of February 2022, mutual return by the U.S. and Iran to compliance with their commitments under the JCPOA has not been realized.

Under these circumstances, the situation in the Middle East surrounding Iran remains highly tense, with a fire incident at a uranium enrichment facility in Natanz in April and an attack on a centrifuge manufacturing facility on the outskirts of Tehran in June. Furthermore, there have been a series of incidents that hinder the free navigation of vessels since January in the Middle East including Iran since January. In January, a Korean tanker was captured by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Navy in the Strait of Hormuz. Between February and April, there have been attacks on ships related to Iran and Israel, and in July, an oil tanker operated by a British company was attacked in the Gulf of Oman, killing two crew members.

Meanwhile, Iran and Saudi Arabia, which severed diplomatic ties, have held talks since

April, and both countries have expressed their willingness to ease tensions in the Middle East and improve bilateral relations. In August and September, Iraq hosted a gathering of regional countries that included Iran and Saudi Arabia and dialogues between parties in the Middle East have been actively conducted.

From the perspective of having an alliance with the U.S. and maintaining its long-standing friendly relationship with Iran, Japan has made its own diplomatic efforts to ease tensions and stabilize the situation in the Middle East. Japan is using every opportunity to communicate closely with Iran. In March, Foreign Minister Motegi held a telephone call with Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif and, Foreign Minister Motegi visited Iran in August. Foreign Minister Hayashi held telephone calls with Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian in December and February, and Prime Minister Kishida held a telephone call with Iranian President Raisi in February. (See the Special Feature on page 159.)

(6) Turkey

Turkey is a geopolitically important regional power. As a member country of the NATO, Turkey plays a significant role in regional security while proactively pursuing multifaceted diplomacy with Europe and the U.S., Russia and countries in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Turkey has traditionally been one of the friendliest countries with Japan, as typified by episodes such as the Ertugrul Frigate¹ incident in 1890.

After the transition from a parliamentary cabinet system to a new presidential system in 2018, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan showed strong leadership in the fight against COVID-19, keeping the number of deaths at low levels through enhanced testing and Turkey's own model

1 https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/ms/da/page22_001052.html



of treatment, which temporarily restored his approval rating. However, the previously unfavorable economic indicators were further aggravated by COVID-19. In particular, the Turkish lira continued to hit market lows due to repeated policy rate cuts amid accelerating inflation. Accelerating inflation has squeezed the livelihoods of conservative workers and low- and middle-income groups that have supported the president.

On the diplomatic front, Turkey promoted the resumption of dialogue and rebuilt relations with regional countries, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, where there had been concerns about deteriorating relations. In particular, relations with the UAE were strengthened when Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Mohammed visited Turkey for the first time in about 10 years and signed 10 agreements on energy, the environment and other issues. Although there were pessimistic views about the future of U.S.-Turkish relations due to the sanctions by the U.S. over the purchase of a Russian-made missile defense system (S-400) continues to be a concern for bilateral relations, and the Biden administration's statement mourning the Armenian "genocide" early in its administration, the two countries held two face-to-face summit meetings where communication was promoted.

Regarding relations with Japan, Foreign Minister Motegi visited Turkey in August and held talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlut Cavusoglu and paid a courtesy call to President Erdoğan. At the summit level, Prime Minister Kishida



Japan-Turkey Foreign Ministers' Meeting (August 2021, Istanbul)

held a telephone call with President Erdoğan in December, where President Erdoğan expressed his congratulations on Prime Minister Kishida's new post, while Prime Minister Kishida expressed his desire to work with President Erdoğan to further develop relations with Turkey as a strategic partner.

(7) Iraq

After the Iraq War in 2003, Iraq enacted a new constitution in 2005, and a government formed through democratic elections is in charge of running the country. The stability of Iraq is important for the stability of the Middle East region, and its main challenges are reconstruction after eliminating the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), restoring security and improving administrative services such as the supply of electricity.

Japan has continued to provide assistance to Iraq since 2003. In August, Foreign Minister Motegi visited Iraq for the first time in 15 years as Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, and met with President Barham Salih, Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Fuad Hussein, and gave advance notice regarding yen loans of up to 32.7 billion Japanese yen relating to the "Basra Refinery Upgrading Project." In addition, in order to support the fifth elections for the Iraqi Council of Representatives held in October, the Government of Japan provided equipment to the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq via the UNDP, such as servers for biometric registration and COVID-19 supplies for polling stations.

On the diplomatic front, the Al-Kadhimi administration is aiming for a balanced diplomacy in Iraq, where cooperation with neighboring countries is essential in countering terrorism and strengthening economic and energy relations. In August, Iraq hosted an international meeting with the heads of neighboring countries.

With regard to domestic affairs, in the fifth elections for the Iraqi Council of Representatives in October, the Shiite Sadrist Movement became the

Support for Japanese Companies in Iran While Operating Under Economic Sanctions

Embassy of Japan in Iran

The history of diplomatic relations between Japan and Iran spans more than 90 years, since the establishment of Japan's legation in Iran in 1929. Japan continues to strengthen bilateral relations with Iran in various fields, while at the same time, making diplomatic efforts toward easing tensions and stabilizing the situation in the Middle East region.

Looking at the economic and trade relations, Japan used to import a high volume of Iranian crude oil, and the two countries have been expanding their economic relations. After the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was established, Japan concluded the Japan-Iran Investment Agreement with Iran and has provided support to Japanese companies to set up business in Iran. However, with the resumption of economic sanctions on Iran following the withdrawal of the U.S. from the JCPOA in 2018, Japan-Iran economic and trade relations have shrunk significantly. Many Japanese companies that invested in Iran and established offices in the country had no choice but to scale down or reduce the number of offices. Moreover, Japanese companies that have continued their businesses in Iran face unique challenges. For example, they are unable to convert Japanese yen to the local currency nor remit money into Iran from overseas. Hence, they currently face various problems in conducting their businesses in Iran.

However, Japanese companies that are active in Iran are maintaining their local presence, as well as maintaining their relationships with Iranian companies and other business partners, in anticipation of future resumption or expansion of business. There is a strong and deeply-rooted trust in Japanese products, such as cars and electrical appliances, among many Iranian people. As such, we are able to sense a strong desire and anticipation for the return of more Japanese companies to Iran as soon as possible. One of the roles of the Embassy of Japan in Iran is to identify the issues Japanese companies are facing, such as through regular interviews with Japanese company workers stationed in Iran, and to work towards resolving these issues. Although many of the issues - including the impact of economic sanctions - that the various companies are confronting are unique, the Embassy is actively working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Central Bank of Iran, among other Iranian authorities, with a view to resolving them. Taking the opportunity of visit of Foreign Minister Motegi to Iran in August, the two countries signed a Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement (CMAA) with a view to promoting the flow of people and goods between Japan and Iran in the future.



Signing of Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement (CMAA) (August, Tehran)

In addition, amid the growing severity of air pollution in Iran, Iran aims to increase the proportion of renewable energy in its power generation capacity. Hence, future business growth is anticipated in fields such as solar power and hydropower generation. In addition to conventional energy sources such as its rich resources of crude oil and natural gas, there is also business potential in Iran for new energy fields such as hydrogen and ammonia. Furthermore, Iran is demonstrating strong interest in working with Japanese companies on efforts to promote recycling, an area that is relatively new to the country.

Despite many constraints, the Embassy of Japan in Iran is living and working on a united front with Japanese residents and companies in Tehran to explore future business opportunities. Going forward, we will continue to support Japanese companies to realize greater development in Japan-Iran relations in the economic field as well as other sectors.

leading party. While the elections were generally peaceful, some groups, mainly Shiite, protested against the results, and on November 5, protesters were killed when security forces clashed with demonstrators. On November 7, an assassination attempt was also made on Prime Minister Al-Kadhimi when a drone carrying an explosive device attacked his residence.

Regarding the security situation, although the Iraqi government is working to strengthen security measures, ISIL carried out two suicide bombings in central Baghdad in January, killing 32 civilians and wounding 110 others. There have also been attacks targeting the U.S. embassy and bases where U.S. troops are stationed.

The coalition forces led by the U.S., that have supported the Iraqi armed forces and security agencies in operations to wipe out ISIL, have handed over its mission to the Iraqi armed forces from the end of March 2020 and have withdrawn from several bases. As a result, the U.S. has reduced its troops to 2,500 by January 15, 2021. In July, the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue was held between Prime Minister Al-Kadhimi and U.S. President Biden where they agreed that the U.S. forces stationed in Iraq would end their combat mission by the end of 2021 and shift to an advisory, support and reinforcement role. In northern Iraq, Turkish troops have been conducting military operations against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) since June 2020, including ground fighting.

(8) Jordan

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



Japan-Jordan Foreign Ministers' video teleconference meeting (December 2021)

community. In April, Prime Minister Suga released a video message to congratulate the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on the State's first Centennial.

Regarding relations with Japan, a foreign minister's telephone call was held in May in response to clashes in Gaza, and the two countries shared the view on the importance of working on confidence-building between Israel and Palestine by all means. In August, Foreign Minister Motegi visited Jordan to discuss ways to strengthen bilateral relations with Minister of Foreign Affairs Ayman Safadi at the Second Japan-Jordan Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue, such as assistance for the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, economic cooperation, people-to-people exchanges and support for refugees. The two ministers also exchanged views on a broad range of matters that included the situation in Afghanistan. In addition, the visit resumed face-to-face exchanges, such as a courtesy call on Prince Faisal bin Al Hussein, the king's younger brother. In December, the two countries held a Foreign Ministers' video conference in conjunction with Minister Hayashi's appointment to his post as Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Ministers reaffirmed that the two countries would further develop cooperative relationship under a strategic partnership.

Japan attaches importance to its relations with Jordan, a cornerstone of regional stability. Security cooperation is ongoing as the third Japan-Jordan Politico-Military Dialogue was held in November. In addition, Japan provides economic and financial

support via disbursement of 100 million US dollars of development policy loans in December.

(9) The Gulf States and Yemen

The Gulf States are important partners for Japan from the perspective of Japan's energy security. In recent years, the Gulf States have been working toward social and economic reforms, prioritizing issues such as industry diversification, human resources development and a departure from dependence on oil. Japan has been cooperating and supporting the realization of these reforms in order to contribute to the long-term stability and prosperity of the Middle East. Specifically, these efforts include cooperation based on the "Japan-Saudi Vision 2030," which was formulated by Japan and Saudi Arabia as a compass for bilateral cooperation modeled after the "Saudi Vision 2030," Saudi Arabia's initiative for industry diversification and departure from dependence on oil, and on the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Initiative" between Japan and the UAE.

Although COVID-19 affected official travel, Foreign Minister Motegi visited Qatar in August and held the First Japan-Qatar Strategic Dialogue with Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani where both sides shared the view to further enhance cooperation in a wide range of fields beyond the energy field under the "Comprehensive Partnership." During his visit to New York in September for the UN General Assembly meeting, Foreign Minister Motegi also met face-to-face with Qatari Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani where both ministers reaffirmed to continue to work together to strengthen bilateral relations, including responses to the various issues related to Afghanistan. Furthermore, Foreign Minister Motegi held telephone calls with Kuwait (August and October) and the UAE (September), where he affirmed to strengthen bilateral relations and work toward easing tensions and stabilizing the situation in the Middle East. Various celebratory events were held in the

region in 2021, such as the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Qatar and the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Kuwait.

Stability in Yemen is important not only for the peace and stability in the Middle East as a whole, but also from the perspective of securing sea lanes, which are directly related to Japan's energy security. In Yemen, the Houthis have continued to fight against the Yemeni Government and the Arab Coalition for over six years despite the international mediation efforts led by Hans Grundberg, Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General. The severe humanitarian situation in Yemen, considered to be the "worst in the world," has continued due to the impact of the prolonged conflict. Since 2015, Japan, as a major donor nation, has provided support of more than 300 million US dollars in total to Yemen through cooperation with UN agencies and others. At the "High-Level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen," which was held online in March, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Washio announced that Japan was committed to continuing both its humanitarian and political efforts, in cooperation with countries concerned, to realize peace and stability in Yemen.

(10) Syria

A Changes in the situation

The Syrian crisis, which began in March 2011, has spanned a decade, sees neither prospects of stabilization nor political resolution, and has forced the population to live below the poverty line with more than 90% living on about 2 US dollars a day. The situation is considered to be the century's worst humanitarian crisis.

Amid a lack of progress in the political process, the Syrian government held presidential elections in May in accordance with the current constitution, while a cease-fire across Syria failed to materialize and discussions under the Constitutional Commission, established in October 2019 through

the mediation of the United Nations, remained far apart. President Assad was re-elected with approximately 95% of the vote, and the future of the political process remains uncertain.

Regarding foreign relations, as the Assad administration has regained control over much of the country and its predominance is evident, high-level exchanges between some Arab countries and Syria resumed, including the first summit telephone call with Jordan in a decade (October) and a visit to Damascus by the UAE foreign minister (November). Meanwhile, European countries and the U.S. remain cautious about resuming relations with the Syrian government due to the Assad administration's use of chemical weapons and human rights violations.

On the military and security front, the Assad administration has stepped up its offensive to take control of Idlib in the northwest, the last rebel stronghold. In the south, the Syrian government has made progress in pacifying the remaining rebel militants after major clashes between government forces and former rebels opposed to disarming. Although security in the capital Damascus has generally been maintained, an explosion targeting a government forces bus occurred on October 20 (the first large explosion in the capital in a year).

B The Japanese Government's Efforts

Japan has consistently maintained its position that the crisis in Syria cannot be resolved by any military means, and a political solution is indispensable, while continuous assistance is important for the improvement of humanitarian situation. From this standpoint, following the aggravation of situation in Syria since 2012, Japan has provided total assistance worth more than 3.2 billion US dollars to Syria and neighboring countries for humanitarian assistance.

(11) Lebanon

In September, a new cabinet headed by former Prime Minister Najib Mikati was formed after a political vacuum of more than a year after the

massive explosion at the Port of Beirut in August 2020. The new cabinet has challenges, such as carrying out administrative and financial reforms, dealing with a severe power crisis associated with the unprecedented economic and financial crisis, fighting COVID-19 and investigating the truth behind the port explosion, but no major progress has been made. In October, clashes broke out between protesters demanding the dismissal of the judge in charge of investigating the case of the port explosion. Later that month, Lebanon's Information Minister's comments about the civil war in Yemen before assuming office provoked protests from Gulf countries, leading to a diplomatic row with Gulf countries that resulted in his resignation.

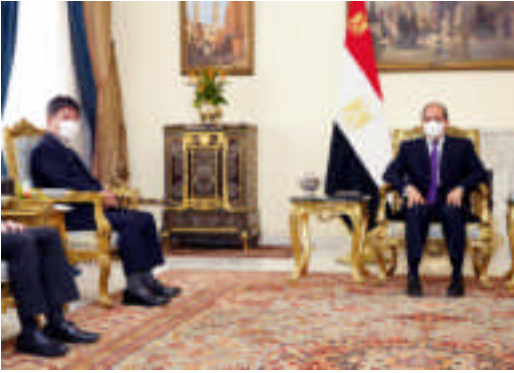
Since 2012, Japan has provided more than 250 million US dollars in assistance to help the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Lebanon. In August, France and the UN co-hosted the "International Conference in Support of the Lebanese People" in a virtual format. State Minister for Foreign Affairs Washio explained the additional support for Lebanon through international organizations, and emphasized that the only way for Lebanon to overcome the current challenges is to take action toward reforms and make progress in talks with the International Monetary Fund.

3 The Situation in North Africa (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco)

(1) Egypt

Egypt is a major power in the region playing a significant role in the stability of the Middle East and North Africa located in the northeast of the African continent and bordering Europe across the Mediterranean Sea. On the economic front, whereas the negative impact of COVID-19 (such as declining tourism revenues) continues, it has been limited compared with neighboring countries, and its GDP continues to maintain positive growth.

Steady progress has been seen in Japan-Egypt relations since President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's



Foreign Minister Motegi pays a courtesy call to Egyptian President El-Sisi (August, Cairo, Egypt)

visit to Japan in February 2016. Cooperation covers various areas such as introduction of Japanese-style education, strengthening support for the Egypt-Japan University of Science and Technology (E-JUST), and the construction program of the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM). In March, a Japanese-related vessel ran aground in the Suez Canal, but the vessel departed safely in July. In March, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Washio issued a video message to the “Second Annual Meeting of the Aswan Forum” hosted by the Egyptian government. In April, Foreign Minister Motegi co-chaired the “Second Japan-Arab Political Dialogue” in an online format, attended by foreign ministers and representatives from member states and region of the League of Arab States. Following the Japan-Egypt Foreign Ministers’ telephone call in June, Foreign Minister Motegi visited Egypt in August to strengthen relations with the country through talks with President El-Sisi and Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry. Minister Motegi also met with Ahumed Aboul Gheit, Secretary General of the League of Arab States, to strengthen relations with the League.

Regarding the two SDF personnel of the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) stationed in the Sinai Peninsula, who have been dispatched since April 2019, a third rotation of personnel was conducted in April to continue to contribute to regional peace and stability.

(2) Libya

In Libya, following the collapse of the Qadhafi administration in 2011, the parliament and the government have split, with each located in the east and the west of the country, respectively, and the situation remains unstable. In April 2019, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, powerful commander of the eastern “Libyan National Army (LNA),” ordered an advance on Tripoli. Although it developed into an armed conflict, the Government of National Unity (GNA), with the support of Turkey, launched a counterattack since May 2020, resulting in a standoff along a line connecting the central coastal city of Sirte and the inland city of Jufra. Meanwhile, a permanent ceasefire agreement was signed between both sides later in October, and no major armed clashes have occurred since then.

On the political front, the UN-led National Dialogue Forum was held in Tunis in November 2020 with 75 Libyan representatives, and a basic agreement was reached to hold a series of elections on Independence Day on December 24, 2021. However the election-related law has not been enacted, and postponement of the elections was announced on December 22.

(3) Maghreb Countries

The Maghreb region is of great economic importance in Africa due to its geographical advantage of being located at the junction to Europe, the Middle East and Africa and its high potential due to its abundant and inexpensive young labor force. In addition, each country in the region has overcome the “Arab Spring” and maintained political stability in its own way. On the other hand, due to the impact of COVID-19, overcoming regional disparities and high unemployment rates has become an issue in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. There are also concerns about the security implications of the flow of weapons and illegal immigrants from Libya and the Sahel region.

The economic stagnation in Tunisia caused by COVID-19 and problems in the health care system have led to public dissatisfaction, and the Hechem

Mechichi cabinet, which was inaugurated in September 2020, was forced to step down on July 25, 2021 by President Kais Saïed, who announced he would initiate political reforms in the country. He also suspended the activities of the Assembly of Representatives the same day with the aim of eradicating corruption in politics. Subsequently, the president nominated Najla Bouden to head the cabinet, and inaugurated the new cabinet on October 11 as the first female prime minister in Tunisia's history. It remains to be seen whether the new Bouden administration, under the leadership of President Saïed, will be able to quickly and adequately address the pressing economic and social challenges it faces today in a manner that enjoys broad public support.

In Algeria, the protests against the long rule of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika since February 2019 have become prolonged, resulting in the administration resigning in April. The presidential election was held in December 2019, and former Prime Minister Abdelmadjid Tebboune was elected. As part of the political reforms aimed at realizing a "new Algeria," President Tebboune amended the constitution and held elections for the People's National Assembly (lower house). A referendum on constitutional reform was held on November 1, 2020, the anniversary of the Revolution, and despite the extremely low turnout (23.7%), the proposed constitutional reform was adopted. In June 2021, the People's National Assembly elections were held ahead of schedule, and the National Liberation Front continued

to be the largest political force. Following the results of the election, Prime Minister Aïmene Benabderrahmane was appointed in July and a new cabinet was formed. In August, the Algerian government announced that it would sever diplomatic relations with Morocco, citing the country's ongoing hostilities.

In Morocco, the House of Representatives election was held on September 8, 2021, and the former second place party, the National Rally of Independents (RNI), advanced to hold the most seats, and occupied two-thirds of all seats by forming a coalition government with the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM) and the Istiqlal Party (PI). However, the Justice and Development Party (PJD), which has led the government for 10 years from 2011, was relegated to the opposition as it lost its seats to incumbent ministers, including Head of Government Saad Dine el Otmani, primarily due to the delay in taking measures against COVID-19 and the high unemployment rate. In the House of Councilors election held on October 5, the RNI, PAM and PI coalition also won a majority, but the PJD drastically reduced the number of seats. Following the results of both elections, leader of the RNI, Aziz Akhannouch, who was appointed by King Mohammed VI as Head of Government, formed a new cabinet on October 7. With the support of the ruling coalition, which has a majority in both houses, the focus of attention will be on how the Head of Government will implement economic and social policies in a stable manner.

60 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Kuwait

2021 marked 60 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Kuwait.

The relations between Japan and Kuwait date back further than the formal establishment of diplomatic relations on December 8, 1961. Kuwait became independent in 1961, but active economic activity was already occurring, such as in 1958 when the Japanese-owned Arabian Oil Company conducted oil drilling in the Khafji Oil Field located offshore of the Saudi Arabian-Kuwaiti neutral zone.

In 2021, while taking thorough precautions against the spread of COVID-19, a range of commemorative events were held. To celebrate 60 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, Foreign Minister Motegi held two telephone calls with H.E. Sheikh Dr. Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohamed Al-Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

On December 8, the anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, the Embassy of Kuwait in Japan hosted a photo exhibition charting the shared history of the two countries, and was attended by Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Honda Taro. The opening of the exhibition featured a video message from Minister Ahmad, expressing congratulations to the governments and people of both countries.

On the same day, the landmark Kuwait Towers were specially illuminated to mark the 60th anniversary, with scenes of Japanese residents and Kuwaiti locals celebrating together beside the towers featured in state-run Kuwait Television and various newspapers.

2021 also marked ten years since the Great East Japan Earthquake, and the towers lit up in March to show solidarity between the two countries, which was demonstrated by the large amount of recovery assistance from Kuwait such as donations of crude oil. In addition, the Embassy of Japan in Kuwait produced and released a video conveying gratitude for the recovery assistance from Kuwait, which attracted many comments from Kuwaitis showing their hopes for the recovery of the disaster-struck area. In Japan, Nihonmatsu City in Fukushima Prefecture expressed its appreciation for assistance from Kuwait to the disaster-struck area by becoming the host town for the Kuwait Team at the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020.

In addition, in November, the Japanese Association in Kuwait held the “Operation Tortoise” coastline cleanup day in Kuwait City. Hosted with the assistance of the Kuwait Environment Public Authority, in addition to Japanese residents, more than 800 Kuwaiti locals participated in the cleanup day. All participants wore T-shirts with the logo commemorating 60 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Kuwait.



Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Honda attending the Kuwait photographic exhibition (December, Tokyo)



Illumination of the Kuwait Towers (March)



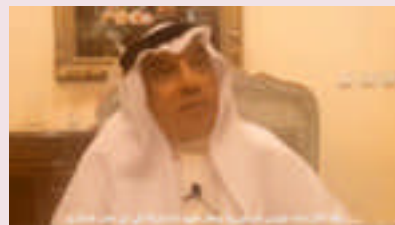
Logo commemorating 60 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Kuwait



"Operation Tortoise" cleanup day (November, Kuwait City)

Furthermore, the Embassy of Japan in Kuwait released online videos throughout the year showcasing Japanese language and culture as well as the cooperative relations between the two countries, such as Japan's initiatives in response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

The wide range of initiatives taken in both Japan and Kuwait in 2021 provided reminders of the bonds between the two nations, and made it a year renewing the determination to further develop bilateral relations in the future.



Interview with H.E. Abdulla Bishara, former Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) from the video "Japan and Kuwait in Solidarity -Witnesses of History-" (August, online)

50 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Qatar

2021 marked 50 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Qatar.

Qatar may not be very familiar to the people of Japan, but many will likely have heard the name of its capital, Doha. In 1993, the Japanese men's national soccer team played against Iraq in a match that determined whether or not the team would participate in the FIFA Soccer World Cup for the first time. During the extra time of the second-half of that match, the Japanese team allowed Iraq to catch-up to a tie, and ended up being eliminated in the preliminary round. This match, held in Qatar, became known as the "Tragedy of Doha."

In addition, Japan and Qatar have built strong relations in the field of liquefied natural gas (LNG), which is mainly used as fuel for electricity generation. Japan imports over 8 million tons of LNG each year from Qatar, which is around 11% of the total import volume. Qatar is one of the world's leading LNG exporters, and with a per capita GDP of approximately 62,000 dollars, has become in a short period, one of the world's ten wealthiest countries. Japan has contributed to Qatar's development through its purchases of LNG.

In August 2021, which marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, Foreign Minister Motegi visited Qatar, holding the First Japan-Qatar Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue with H.E. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. At the outset, Minister Motegi praised the outstanding performance of Qatari athletes at the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020, and also expressed his will to further develop "the Comprehensive Partnership" between the two countries, taking this opportunity. The two Ministers of Foreign Affairs also held talks in New York at the United Nations General Assembly in September, agreeing to continue close collaboration to strengthen bilateral relations, including in response to issues concerning Afghanistan. Subsequently, Qatar assisted in the evacuation of Afghani nationals who have connections with Japan, and by the end of 2021, approximately 500 of them had left Afghanistan and safely arrived in Japan.

In addition, while taking thorough precautions against the spread of COVID-19, a range of events were successfully held, including a Japanese poetry competition in November co-hosted with the Qatar Ministry of Culture. In 2022, many occasions are being planned to further enliven the relations between Japan and Qatar, including a Japanese speech competition as well as karate and judo events.



Japan-Qatar Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue (August, Qatar)



Poster promoting entry to the Japanese poetry competition (November, Qatar)