Section 7 | The Middle East and North Africa

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. In addition, Russia's aggression against Ukraine on February 24 caused energy prices to rise sharply, and attention was focused on the role of oil and gas-producing countries in the Gulf region in stabilizing energy markets.

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, parties concerned, including the Government of Yemen and the Houthis agreed on a temporary truce in April, 2022, but this expired in October, and the severe security and humanitarian situation continues. The risk of the spread of violent extremism such as the “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL) also remains in some areas. Furthermore, in Afghanistan, there are concerns that the serious humanitarian situation since the Taliban's takeover of Kabul in August 2021 may further deteriorate.

On the other hand, since 2020, the situation in some countries and regions is shifting toward rapprochement. In 2020, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco agreed to normalize diplomatic relations with Israel, and in 2021, the Qatar diplomatic crisis\(^1\) that had been ongoing since 2017 was resolved. Other developments that contribute to regional stability include Turkey's normalization of its diplomatic relations with Israel in 2022 for the first time in four years, and the demarcation of the maritime boundary between Israel and Lebanon, mediated by the United States.

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. The impact of these policies on the Middle East continues to be the focus of attention. In July 2022, President Biden visited Israel, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia for his first visit to the Middle East since taking office. China is also strengthening its ties with the Middle East. In December, President Xi Jinping visited Saudi Arabia for his first trip to the Middle East since 2016, where he held the first China-Saudi Arabia summit, the first China-GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) summit, and the first China-Arab summit.

Japan imports over 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 countries in the Middle East in a wide range of fields that include economy, politics, security, culture, and people-to-people exchanges. In March, Foreign Minister Hayashi visited Turkey

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\(^1\) In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Egypt, and other countries announced they had severed diplomatic relations with Qatar, citing Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which is designated a terrorist organization by these countries.
and the UAE, and in August, he visited Tunisia to attend the Eighth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 8). In September, Prime Minister Kishida and Foreign Minister Hayashi held talks with the countries in the region, seizing the opportunity of the UN General Assembly and the state funeral for the late Prime Minister ABE Shinzo, and confirmed their close cooperation for regional stability with the respective countries. In addition, amid the instability in the energy market in the wake of the situation in Ukraine, Japan repeatedly conducted high-level outreach to the Gulf countries to help stabilization of the international crude oil market, including through telephone calls.

Following Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the Middle East, which depends on imports from Russia and Ukraine for much of its staple grain consumption, has been greatly affected by rising wheat import prices and other factors, and Japan is providing various assistance for these regions in cooperation with other relevant countries. For example, in July, Japan decided to provide a total of approximately 200 million US dollars in food security assistance for Middle Eastern and African countries and others that are facing a food crisis due to the situation over Ukraine. Japan, at various levels including the political level at international conferences, has been sending a message about its support for the countries affected by Russia's aggression, as well as the importance of responding to the situation especially in vulnerable regions, based on the principle of human security.

In 2023, a large-scale earthquake occurred in southeastern Turkey in February, causing severe damage in Turkey and Syria. In response, Japan has been implementing various kinds of assistance, including dispatching Japan Disaster Relief (JDR) teams (rescue teams, medical teams, etc.), transporting medical team equipment and materials by Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) aircraft, providing emergency relief supplies, and implementing emergency grant aid, based on the policy of promptly providing necessary support on the basis of local needs.

2 Situation in the Middle East

(1) Afghanistan
Located at the nexus of the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia, Afghanistan is a geopolitically important country that has historically been a crossroads of various religions, cultures, and ethnic groups.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban seized control of the capital, Kabul, in August 2021, and announced formation of a “transitional government” the following month, but a lack of ethnic and religious inclusiveness has been pointed out. The international community has also expressed its serious concern over reports of significant restrictions on the rights of women and girls, including the suspension of girls’ secondary and higher education. There are also concerns about the deteriorating security situation, with terrorist attacks by groups affiliated with ISIL targeting educational institutions, mosques, and diplomatic missions in various parts of the country.

Against this backdrop, Japan continues to engage directly with Taliban officials on the concerns of the international community, including the establishment of an inclusive political system, respect for the rights of all Afghans, including women and minorities, and a break with terrorism.

According to the United Nations (UN), about two-thirds of Afghanistan's population is in need of humanitarian assistance, and the country is suffering from severe economic stagnation and food shortages due to a combination of natural disasters, including recent droughts, floods, and earthquakes. In light of this critical situation, Japan, in cooperation with other donor countries, has continued to provide humanitarian assistance and basic human needs (minimum requirements for a basic human life) through international organizations since the Taliban's overthrow of Kabul. In 2022, the Government of Japan provided emergency relief supplies and emergency grant aid of 3 million US dollars in response to the massive earthquake that struck the eastern part of the country in June. In December, the Government of Japan decided
Relations between the Middle East and North Africa and Japan, the U.S., China, etc., Seen Through Economic Data

- **Trade:** China ranks first in terms of both import and export. The share of Japan and the U.S. has been on a long-term decline. Japan was the largest export destination until it was overtaken by China in the 2010s (Saudi Arabia and the UAE are main exporters to Japan. China has significant trade with Iraq and Turkey in addition to Saudi Arabia and the UAE). Not only European countries and the U.S., but also India has a certain presence in the region. In 2021, Japan ranked third in terms of its share in the region’s exports, and 10th in terms of imports.

- **Investment:** Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey account for the majority of the region’s inward FDI stock. Among these, the U.S., which is the largest foreign investor in Israel, has a large presence. Europe also has a certain share. In contrast, Japan and China have a limited share.

- **Finance:** External debts to various countries exist, mainly to Europe and Japan. Recently, external debts to China have been on the rise. Japan was the second largest bilateral creditor country in 2021.

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**Share of Japan, the U.S., China, etc. in the Middle East and North Africa’s exports**

- **Share of Japan, the U.S., China, etc. in the Middle East and North Africa’s imports**

**Share of Japan, the U.S., China, etc. in the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) stock in the Middle East and North Africa**

**Bilateral External Debt in the Middle East and North Africa**

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Note 1: Prepared by MOFA based on IMF (DOT) data.

Note 2: Figures for China are the sum of Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau. Graphs for past figures may be skewed due to missing data, etc.
to provide additional assistance of approximately 98 million US dollars in its FY2022 supplementary budget to support humanitarian needs such as food, health, water and sanitation, and agriculture. Japan has provided a total amount of assistance of approximately 339 million US dollars since August 2021.

Japan intends to continue to provide assistance that aligns with the people of Afghanistan and to contribute to ensuring stability in the region surrounding Afghanistan.

(2) 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. After the inauguration of the Biden administration in the U.S., there were momentary signs that indicate the resumption of cooperation between the parties, and there were some positive developments such as high-level contacts. However, since March 2022, an unstable and tense situation has been continuing, as seen in the deterioration of the security situation on the ground such as violent acts and clashes that occur intermittently in Israel and Palestine, including in Jerusalem, resulting in numerous casualties. In the Gaza Strip, tensions rose following the detention of a senior Palestinian militant by Israel on August 1, which developed into an exchange of attacks between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the Palestinian armed groups since August 5. 43 Palestinians were killed and 300 of them injured in three days until the Egyptian-brokered ceasefire.

B The Government of Japan’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.

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 2022, 14 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.

In Israel, the government has reached an impasse due to a deepening confrontation within the coalition government led by Yamina party leader Naftali Bennett, with a number of lawmakers splitting from the government. Prime Minister Bennett stepped down in June after passing a bill to dissolve parliament and deciding to hold general elections on November 1. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid took over as Prime Minister under the rotating prime ministerial system agreed upon when the government was formed. In November’s general election—the fifth election in the three-and-a-half years since April 2019, the ruling coalition bloc and the right-wing bloc led by former Prime Minister Netanyahu competed, and the latter won a majority of 64 seats. Former Prime Minister Netanyahu was tasked with forming a new Cabinet, and a new government that included right-wing parties was inaugurated in December.

Regarding relations with Japan, the year 2022 marked the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, and many events took place in...
Japan and Israel. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Benjamin Gantz and Minister of Tourism Yoel Razvozov visited Japan in August and September respectively. In November, the launch of the Joint Study Group on the possibility of a Japan-Israel Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) was announced.

(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 this, however, relations between the Fatah led by President Abbas and Hamas deteriorated, and Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip by military force. In October 2017, an agreement in principle was reached through Egyptian mediation to transfer authority in Gaza to the Palestinian Authority. In October 2022, through Algerian mediation, the Algiers Declaration, a reconciliation document between Palestinian factions, was signed, which includes the holding of Palestinian Legislative Council elections within one year, but as there is no concrete prospect for its implementation, the division remains, with the West Bank of the Jordan River still being held by Fatah and the Gaza Strip remaining under Hamas’s de facto control.

In relations with Japan, former Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah attended the state funeral for the late Prime Minister ABE Shinzo in September on behalf of President Abbas and exchanged views with Prime Minister Kishida.

(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 been under way in fields such as medicine and health including the provision of COVID-19 vaccines, the environment, disaster preparedness, and consular affairs.

Regarding the Iranian nuclear issue, since July 2019, Iran has taken steps that undermine its commitment to the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), 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. As of the end of 2022, Iran is producing up to 60% enriched uranium. 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 2021, 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. However, negotiations have faced difficulties, and mutual return by the U.S. and Iran to compliance with their commitments under the JCPOA has not been realized.

Under these circumstances, in March 2022, Iran claimed that the Israeli attacks on Iran came from a base in northern Iraq and launched missile attacks on the city of Erbil in northern Iraq. In May, there was a series of incidents in Tehran, including the killing of an Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps colonel in Tehran and an accident at a research facility of the Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry on the outskirts of Tehran. In the same month Iran captured two Greek-flagged oil tankers alleging they had committed violations in the Strait of Hormuz, located at the entrance to the Persian Gulf. Since September, there have been intermittent rocket and other attacks by Iran on northern Iraq. In October, there was also
a terrorist attack by ISIL at a Shiite holy temple in Shiraz, a southern city in Southern Iran. Thus, the situation surrounding Iran remains highly tense.

Meanwhile, since April 2021, Iran and Saudi Arabia, which severed diplomatic ties, have been holding talks, and in April 2022, the fifth round of talks between the two countries was held in Baghdad, Iraq. Talks are also taking place between Iran and its neighbors, including Qatar, Oman, and the UAE.

In September, a protest movement broke out in Iran, triggered by the death of Mahsa Amini, who was arrested by the police over how she wore her hijab (a scarf worn to hide her hair), and clashes between the protesters and security forces continued. In response, the G7 Foreign Ministers issued a statement, along with a joint statement from the UN Human Rights Council, calling on the Government of Iran to refrain from the use of force against peaceful protests. In addition, a resolution was adopted at a special session of the UN Human Rights Council in November to establish a fact-finding mission to investigate the deteriorating human rights situation in Iran, and in December, the UN Economic and Social Council also adopted a resolution to expel Iran from the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

The international community’s condemnation of Iran’s provision of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) to Russia increased in the wake of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. Subsequently, Iran revealed that it had provided drones to Russia prior to the start of the aggression against Ukraine.

Japan is an ally of the U.S. while maintaining good relations with Iran for many years. In February, Foreign Minister Hayashi held a telephone call with Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, while Prime Minister Kishida held a telephone call with President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi. Furthermore, in September, Prime Minister Kishida held the first face-to-face meeting with President Raisi in New York during his visit to the U.S. Japan has taken every opportunity to directly convey to Iran its concerns about various issues related to Iran and has made unique diplomatic efforts to ease tensions and stabilize the situation in the Middle East region.

(6) Turkey

Turkey is a geopolitically important regional power. As a member country of 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 Ertuğrul Frigate 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, which temporarily restored his approval rating. However, longtime weak economic indicators have not improved, and the lira has 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 President Erdoğan, and with the country’s 100th anniversary and presidential and parliamentary elections in 2023, President Erdoğan’s approval rating has been stagnant.

On the diplomatic front, Turkey continued its efforts to resume dialogue and rebuild relations with countries in the region with which there had been concerns about deteriorating relations. President Erdoğan visited the UAE in February for the first time in nine years, Saudi Arabia in April for the first time in five years, and Armenia in October for the first time in 13 years, and held a summit meeting during each visit. In relation to Israel, with which Turkey held a Foreign Ministers’ meeting in August, both countries sent ambassadors to each other for the first time in four years. Regarding Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, Turkey has been actively engaged in mediating diplomacy, making the most of its good relations with both Russia and Ukraine, and has contributed greatly to the resumption of grain exports from Ukraine through the Black Sea.

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2 For details of the Ertuğrul Frigate incident, please refer to https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/ms/da/page22_001052.html (Japanese only)
Regarding relations with Japan, Foreign Minister Hayashi visited Turkey in March and held talks with Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu attended the state funeral for the late Prime Minister ABE Shinzo in September, and also held a Foreign Ministers' meeting. At the summit level, Prime Minister Kishida held a summit meeting with President Erdoğan during the UN General Assembly in September.

(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.

On the diplomatic front, Iraq is located between the regional powers of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, and is seeking to strengthen relations with neighboring countries and pursuing a balanced diplomacy. In particular, Iraq has made efforts to mediate between Saudi Arabia and Iran, holding the fifth round of Saudi-Iranian talks in Baghdad in April, with Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi visiting both countries in June.

On the domestic political front, the Sadrists (Shi’a), who won the largest number of seats in the fifth election for the Iraqi Council of Representatives in October 2021, had been aiming to form a new government, but were unable to do so due to a conflict with the main political coalition force, the Shi’a Coordination Framework (SCF), and a state of confusion continued. In June, lawmakers from the Sadrist bloc resigned from the Council, and in August, Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr announced his resignation from politics. In October, the Iraqi Council of Representatives elected Abdul Latif Rashid as the country’s new President.

After that, the Iraqi Council of Representatives approved the cabinet submitted by Prime Minister-designate Mohammed Al-Sudani, who was appointed by the President Rashid, and a new government was formed more than one year after the elections.

Japan has consistently provided assistance to Iraq since 2003. In November, immediately after the new government was formed, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs TAKAGI Kei visited Baghdad and the southern province of Basrah to hold talks with Prime Minister Sudani and three key ministers (Minister of Commerce Atheer Daoud, Minister of Electricity Ziyad Fadhel, and Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Oil Hayan Abdul Ghani as the first foreign guest of the new government of Iraq. In addition to attending the Baghdad International Fair, Vice-Minister Takagi attended the completion ceremony of the “Hartha Thermal Power Station Rehabilitation Project” and the “Basrah Water Supply Improvement Project,” both of which are symbolic yen loan projects of Japan’s assistance to Iraq, and made an inspection tour of the “Basra Refinery Upgrading Project.”

Regarding the security situation, armed clashes broke out in the International Zone in Baghdad in August due to confusion over the formation of a new government, and attacks against the Kurdistan Region (KR) in northern Iraq have become a problem. Turkish forces are continuing military operations, including ground combat, against the Kurdistan Workers’
Party (PKK) in KR, and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard conducted missile and drone attacks against the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) of KR.

(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 peace in the Middle East. The country’s role is highly regarded by the international community.

Regarding relations with Japan, the imperial and royal families of the two countries have traditionally enjoyed friendly relations, and in September King Abdullah II visited Japan for the state funeral for the late Prime Minister ABE Shinzo.

At the summit level, Prime Minister Kishida held a telephone call with His Majesty the King in January where they reaffirmed that the two countries would further develop their cooperative relationship under a strategic partnership. In September, Prime Minister Kishida held a summit meeting with His Majesty the King, who visited Japan for the state funeral for the late Prime Minister ABE Shinzo, and discussed the regional situation, including Middle East Peace, and reaffirmed that they would work closely together for the long-term stability of the region.

At the foreign ministerial level, Foreign Minister Hayashi held meetings with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Ayman Al Safadi in New York in September, where they shared the importance of realizing Middle East Peace based on a “two-state solution” and supporting refugees. The two Ministers also agreed to further develop bilateral relations and various cooperative frameworks, including the holding of the Third Japan-Jordan Foreign Ministers’ Strategic Dialogue and the Japan-Egypt-Jordan Trilateral Consultations.

Furthermore, Japan and Jordan have also been collaborating on the security front, including FY2022 Noncombatant Evacuation Operation training of the Japan Self-Defense Forces conducted in Jordan by the Japanese Ministry of Defense in December and the Fourth Japan-Jordan Politico-Military (PM) Dialogue that was held in the same month. 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 energy security and other factors. In 2022 in particular, energy prices rose due to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and other factors, and the role of the Gulf oil- and gas-producing countries in stabilizing the international energy market has become important. At the same time, the Gulf States have been working toward social and economic reforms, prioritizing issues such as departing from a dependence on oil and diversifying industry. 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. As a framework for comprehensive bilateral cooperation, Japan has established the “Saudi-Japan Vision 2030” with Saudi Arabia and the “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Initiative (CSP)” with the UAE, and is promoting cooperation in a wide range of fields under these frameworks.

In Saudi Arabia, under “Saudi Vision 2030” formulated in 2016, the country is undertaking comprehensive socioeconomic reforms that include starting of tourist visa issuance, promotion of women’s participation in society, and promotion of the entertainment industry, in addition to industrial diversification (developing domestic industrial human resources), human resources development, active investment through the Public Affairs Office)
Investment Fund (PIF), and development of tourist attractions and infrastructure. To support these reform efforts of Saudi Arabia, Japan has confirmed cooperation in stabilizing the international crude oil market through three telephone calls in February, March, and September between Prime Minister Kishida and Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman, and three meetings between Foreign Minister Hayashi and Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud (by phone in February and face-to-face in July and September). They also confirmed they would further promote cooperation in various fields under the framework of the “Saudi-Japan Vision 2030” and strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries.

The UAE, which celebrated the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with Japan (see the Column on page 172), has been the focus of active high-level visits, with Foreign Minister Hayashi visiting the UAE in March and Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology and Special Envoy to Japan Sultan Al Jaber visiting Japan in June and September. Prime Minister Kishida held two telephone calls with President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (who assumed the presidency in May) in March and September to further strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries and to confirm cooperation in stabilizing the international crude oil market. In May, following the passing of President Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Special Envoy of the Prime Minister AMARI Akira paid a condolence visit to the UAE. In September, Foreign Minister Hayashi and Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology, Special Envoy for Japan Sultan Al Jaber signed the “Joint Declaration on the Implementation of the Comprehensive and Strategic Partnership Initiative (CSPI).” The two countries have made significant progress in cooperation, including a substantive agreement concerning the transfer of defense equipment and technology and the introduction of visa exemptions for UAE passport holders from November.

With regard to Oman and Bahrain, which also marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with Japan, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs HONDA Taro visited both countries in June and held talks with foreign ministers and others, and signed the Japan-Bahrain Investment Agreement. Regarding relations between Japan and Bahrain, bilateral cooperation in the political, economic, and business fields has progressed through two summit meetings (by phone in April and face-to-face in September) and a foreign ministers’ telephone call in September, as well as policy consultation between both foreign ministries in September, and coordination toward the early introduction of visa exemption measures for diplomatic and official passport holders. Regarding relations between Japan and Oman, the two countries confirmed further strengthening of bilateral relations, taking advantage of opportunities such as a telephone call at the foreign minister level and the attendance of Adviser at the Diwan of the Royal Court of Oman Salim bin Mustahil bin Ahmed Al Maashani at the state funeral for the late Prime Minister ABE Shinzo in September (see the Column on page 173).

Regarding Qatar, Prime Minister Kishida held two summit telephone calls with Amir of the State of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, in April and September, where they confirmed that Japan would work closely with Qatar, one of the world’s largest gas producing countries, to stabilize the international energy market. In November and December, Qatar hosted the FIFA World Cup, the first FIFA World Cup to be held in the Middle East, in which the Japanese national team participated.

With Kuwait, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Honda visited the country in August, and Foreign Minister Hayashi held two meetings with Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah (by phone in April and face-to-face in September). In addition, in December, Prime Minister Kishida held a telephone call with Crown Prince Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, confirming close cooperation to stabilize the international crude oil market.

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 Government of Yemen and the Arab Coalition, but international mediation efforts led by Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General, Hans Grundberg, resulted...
in a nationwide truce for the first time in six years. Although the truce expired in October, no cross-border attacks by the Houthis occurred until the end of 2022. On the other hand, Yemen is facing a serious situation, considered to be the worst humanitarian crisis in the world due to the impact of the prolonged conflict, and the risk of starvation is further increasing due to soaring grain prices in response to the situation in Ukraine and rising transportation costs caused by rising oil prices. Since 2015, Japan, as a major donor nation, has provided support of more than 400 million US dollars in total to Yemen through cooperation with international organizations and others. In May, Japan decided to provide 10 million US dollars in emergency grant aid (food aid) through the UN World Food Program (WFP) to support the truce.

(10) Syria

A Changes in the situation
The Syrian crisis, which began in March 2011, has spanned over a decade, sees neither prospects of stabilization nor political resolution, and discussions under the Constitutional Committee, which was established in 2019 through the mediation of the UN to bring together the Government and dissidents, are also in deadlock. In April, the Government of Syria issued a large-scale amnesty decree, showing steps toward national reconciliation, but concrete results remain unknown. Meanwhile, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria will reach 14.6 million by the end of 2022 (increase by 1.2 million year-on-year), and the number of internally displaced persons will reach 6.9 million (increase by 200,000 year-on-year), indicating that humanitarian needs are the highest since the crisis began. Furthermore, the progress of the repatriation of refugees who have evacuated to countries surrounding Syria is also said to remain stagnant.

In foreign relations, Syria maintains cooperative relations with Russia and Iran, which support the Assad administration, its efforts to improve relations with Arab countries seen in 2021 have been weak in 2022, and the return of Syria to the Arab League was not discussed at its Summit meeting held in November. Meanwhile, European countries and the U.S. remain cautious about resuming relations with the Government of Syria due to the Assad administration’s use of chemical weapons and human rights violations.

On the military and security front, security in the capital Damascus is generally maintained, while terrorist activities and operations to eliminate them continue, including an attack by ISIL on a prison in Syria (January) and multiple announcements of the deaths of ISIL leaders and others. In the north in particular, Turkey has stepped up air strikes against Kurdish militant groups in retaliation for an explosion in Istanbul in November, and has indicated that it will launch a large-scale ground operation. In addition, Israel, wary of the activities of pro-Iranian and other forces in Syria, has been conducting intermittent air strikes on Damascus International Airport and other areas in Syria.

B The Government of Japan’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. Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Honda attended “the Supporting the future of Syria and the region, Brussels VI Conference” in May, and expressed Japan’s unwavering commitment to humanitarian assistance to Syria. Japan has provided total assistance worth approximately 3.3 billion US dollars to Syria and neighboring countries for humanitarian assistance.

(11) Lebanon

While Lebanon continues to face various challenges, including an economic crisis, there were positive developments, such as the parliamentary elections, held on May 15 as scheduled without major disruptions, and the demarcation of the maritime boundary with Israel and its registration to the UN Secretariat in October.

However, a new cabinet has not been formed after the parliamentary elections due to confrontation among political forces, and talks in the parliament to elect a successor to President Michel Aoun, whose term expired at the end of October, have not been concluded, creating a political vacuum without a president. This political turmoil has spurred further deterioration of the economic and humanitarian situation in Lebanon.
(in October, a cholera outbreak was confirmed in the country for the first time in 30 years.) The depreciation of the currency, the resulting price hikes, as well as ongoing power outages and fuel shortages, have deepened frustration among citizens, leading to frequent attacks on banks and other incidents.

Since 2012, Japan has provided a total of more than 256.8 million US dollars in assistance for Lebanon, where the humanitarian situation is deteriorating. In addition, a technical cooperation agreement was signed between the two countries in March.

### Column

#### 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations

In 2022, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, and Bahrain, various initiatives and exchange activities were held in both Japan and each of the respective countries.

#### 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Relations between Japan and the UAE date back to before May 1972 (the UAE was founded in December 1971) when the two countries established official diplomatic relations. Active exchanges had taken place before the UAE was founded. Japanese companies had been involved in oil development in Abu Dhabi since the late 1960s, and the Emirate of Abu Dhabi participated in the Expo 1970 Osaka. 50 years have passed since then, and cooperation between the two countries is currently progressing not only in the energy sector but also in various other fields. More than 4,000 Japanese residents and more than 300 Japanese companies live and operate in the UAE, forming the largest Japanese community in the Middle East and Africa region.

Dubai hosted the first International Expo in the Middle East region from October 2021 to March 2022. More than 24 million visitors came to the Expo, with a large number of attendees visiting the Japan Pavilion. Minister for the World Expo 2025 WAKAMIYA Kenji attended the closing ceremony, and the UAE passed the torch to Japan for the next Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai.

Cooperation between the two countries has advanced based on the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Initiative (CSPI)" announced in April 2018. In September 2022, Foreign Minister Hayashi and Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology and Special Envoy to Japan Dr. Sultan Al Jaber signed the "Joint Declaration on the Implementation of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Initiative (CSPI) (CSPI framework document)." Based on this declaration, the cooperative relationship between the two countries is expected to be further strengthened not only in the energy sector but also in a wide range of fields such as renewable energy, infrastructure, environment, science and technology, education, space, and defense. In addition, through active exchanges of dignitaries and meetings between the two countries, including the participation of Sheikh Khalid bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (eldest son of Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President), Member of Abu Dhabi Executive Council and Chairman of Abu Dhabi Executive Office, at the state funeral for the late Prime Minister ABE Shinzo in September, where the two sides affirmed they would continue to work closely together to strengthen bilateral relations on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations.

Furthermore, a new visa waiver measure that exempts prior registration for UAE ordinary passport holders started on November 1. This is expected to lead to further increases in the number of tourists from the UAE to Japan and make business activities more convenient.
50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Oman

Oman has long prospered as a maritime nation, located between the Arabian Sea and the Sea of Oman, with the Strait of Hormuz, which leads to the Persian Gulf, within its territorial waters. It is an excellent geopolitical strategic location with access to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, and is important not only for importing oil and natural gas, but also for realizing the vision of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).”

Japan and Oman established official diplomatic relations in 1972. In the 50 years since then, the two countries have strengthened their ties in various fields, particularly in the energy sector, including the participation of Japanese companies in Oman's oil and LNG interests. The relationship between the two countries has deepened further, with the issuance of the “Joint Communiqué on the Strengthening of the Comprehensive Partnership towards Stability and Prosperity Between Japan and the Sultanate of Oman” when Prime Minister Abe became the first Japanese Prime Minister to visit Oman in 2014.

The year 2022 became a commemorative year in which both countries confirmed the ties between them. In addition to a telephone call between Foreign Minister Hayashi and Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr in April, former Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yousuf bin Alawi visited Japan in May to attend the conferment ceremony for the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun. In September, the delegation of the Adviser at the Diwan of the Royal Court of the Sultanate of Oman Salim bin Mustahil bin Ahmed Al Maashani visited Japan to attend the state funeral for the late Prime Minister ABE Shinzo.

50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Bahrain

Bahrain is a small island nation, about the size of Japan's Sado Island, in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Gulf. It was the center of the Dilmun civilization in the third millennium B.C. and has prospered as a pearl-producing region since ancient times.

Japan's relations with Bahrain date back to before the establishment of official diplomatic relations in 1972. In 1932, the first oil field in the Gulf countries was discovered in Bahrain, and in 1934 Bahrain's crude oil was exported to Japan as the first export destination. Thus, Japan and Bahrain have long had strong ties and have developed good relations in a wide range of areas, including energy, politics, economics, business, and security.

In addition, bilateral cooperation is progressing in new fields. In February, the artificial satellite “Light-1,” jointly developed by Bahrain and the UAE, was released from the Japanese Experiment Module “Kibo” on the International Space Station with the cooperation of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), and was successfully put into Earth's orbit. Furthermore, in Bahrain, the presence of Japanese technology and products, led by Japanese cars, remains high. Recently, Japanese anime and manga have become increasingly popular among the younger generation, and Japan is also gaining popularity as a honeymoon destination among the wealthy of Bahrain.

In 2022, there was an active exchange of dignitaries between the two countries. In April, Prime Minister Kishida held a telephone call with Crown Prince and Prime Minister Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, and in September, the first Japan-Bahrain Foreign Ministry policy talks in six years was held in Tokyo, and Undersecretary for Political Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Shaikh Abdulla bin Ahmed bin Abdulla Al Khalifa visited Japan from Bahrain. Moreover, Crown Prince and Prime Minister Salman bin Hamad al Khalifa and Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani attended the state funeral for the late Prime Minister ABE Shinzo at the end of the month. In the meeting that followed, the two countries shared the view to further strengthen bilateral relations on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations.
Visit to Oman and Bahrain by Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Honda

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Honda visited Oman and Bahrain in June.

In Oman, he held meetings with Foreign Minister Badr, Minister of Energy and Minerals Salim bin Nasser bin Said al Aufi, and other members of the Omani cabinet. They exchanged opinions on bilateral cooperation toward the next 50 years, including in clean energy, and shared the view to continue deepening cooperation and working together.

In Bahrain, he held meetings with Minister of Foreign Affairs Zayani and Minister of Finance and National Economy Salman, and signed the Japan-Bahrain Investment Agreement in the presence of Minister of Finance and National Economy Salman. Economic exchanges with Bahrain have continued at various levels, including the establishment of the "Japan-Bahrain Business and Friendship Society" in 2008 and the "Japan-Bahrain Economic Cooperation Association" in 2012. Going forward, the Agreement is expected to further promote the development of an investment environment and further strengthen the economic relationship between the two countries.

Cultural activities

In the UAE, a seminar on the traditional craft “Owari Shippo” (a technique of cloisonne) was held, while in Bahrain, a lecture on Wadaiko (Japanese drums) was held. In Oman, the Japan Self-Defense Forces Band’s first Middle East performance (as part of the event known as Military Music: Oman and the World) was held in November at the Royal Opera House in the capital Muscat by the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force Western Army Band and others.

In Japan, a concert featuring the “oud,” a traditional Arabic musical instrument, was held as a commemorative event with the UAE. The Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Japan hosted the Oman-Yamanashi Jewelry Exhibition in the presence of Her Imperial Highness Princess Tsuguko, and the National Day Reception at the Embassy was attended by many guests, including State Minister for Foreign Affairs YAMADA Kenji and Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs TAKAGI Kei, and lively exchanges were conducted in both the public and private sectors. In addition, it was also an opportunity to further revitalize exchanges in the cultural and academic fields, such as through a symposium held to spread information on the cooperative relationship between Japan and Bahrain in the field of archeology.
3 The Situation in North Africa
(Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco)

(1) Egypt

Egypt, located in the northeast of the African continent and bordering Europe across the Mediterranean Sea, is a major power in the region playing a significant role for the stability of the Middle East and North Africa. On the economic front, its gross domestic product (GDP) maintained positive growth despite the impact of COVID-19 (such as declining tourism revenues). Due to the soaring global food and resource prices in the wake of the deterioration of the situation in Ukraine, in December, the country received support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) through a 46-month Extended Fund Facility (EFF) worth 3 billion US dollars.

Egypt’s relations with Japan continues to be positive. Since President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi’s visit to Japan in 2016, progress has been seen in areas of cooperation such as the introduction of Japanese-style education, strengthening support for the Egypt-Japan University of Science and Technology (E-JUST), the construction project of the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM), and the construction project of the Greater Cairo Metro Line No. 4. Following the Japan-Egypt Foreign Ministers’ video conference meeting on the occasion of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) Ministerial Meeting in March and the Japan-Egypt Summit video conference meeting on the occasion of TICAD 8 in August, a Japan-Egypt Foreign Ministers’ meeting was held during the UN General Assembly in September where they discussed the international situation. They also reaffirmed to further strengthen bilateral relations. In September, Minister of Transport Kamel Elwazer attended the state funeral for late Prime Minister ABE Shinzo as a special envoy of the President and paid a courtesy call on Chief Cabinet Secretary MATSUNO Hirokazu. Environment Minister NISHIMURA Akihiro attended the Egypt-chaired 27th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27) held in Sharm el-Sheikh in November.

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

(2) Libya

Although Libya is an energy powerhouse boasting the greatest oil reserves in Africa, after the collapse of the Qadhafi regime in 2011, the country remains unstable with political power split between the east and the west of the country. In April 2019, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, powerful commander of the eastern “Libyan National Army (LNA),” ordered an advance on Tripoli, leading to armed clashes. The counterattack by the Turkish-backed Government of National Unity (GNA) since May 2020 resulted in a standoff along a line connecting the central coastal city of Sirte and the inland city of Jufra. Armed clashes between the eastern and western forces have decreased significantly following the signing of a permanent ceasefire agreement in October.

On the political front, the UN-led National Dialogue Forum was held in Tunis in November 2020 with 75 participants representing the Libyan people, and a basic agreement was reached to hold a series of elections on December 24 (Independence Day), 2021. While a provisional Government of National Unity (GNU) was established, an election-related law has not been enacted, and postponement of the elections was
announced on December 22, 2021. In March 2022, the parliament based in the east approved a new cabinet, which again created a political power split between the east and the west of the country.

In relations with Japan, Prime Minister Kishida and President Mohammed Menfi of the Presidential Council of Libya held a summit video conference meeting on the occasion of TICAD 8 in August.

(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 great potential thanks to its abundant young labor force. On the other hand, due to the impact of COVID-19 and the situation in Ukraine, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia are faced with the challenge of how to overcome increasing poverty, regional economic disparities, high unemployment rate, and soaring food prices. There are also concerns about the security implications of the flow of weapons and illegal immigrants from Libya and the Sahel region.

In Tunisia, where President Kais Saied has been conducting political reforms since July 2021, a referendum on whether to amend the constitution was held in July 2022, and a new constitution came into effect in August. A new election law was announced in September, and elections for the national assembly were held peacefully in December 2022 and in January 2023.

Regarding Tunisia's relations with Japan, TICAD 8 was held in the Tunisian capital of Tunis in August, and Foreign Minister Hayashi visited Tunisia as a special envoy of the Prime Minister and paid a courtesy call to President Saied and held a meeting with Foreign Minister Othman Jerandi. Prime Minister Kishida also held a summit video conference meeting with President Saied and confirmed that both countries would continue to work closely together to further strengthen bilateral cooperative relations.

In Algeria, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika stepped down in April 2019 following protracted protests against his long rule, and former Prime Minister Abdelmadjid Tebboune assumed the presidency in December that year following presidential elections. As part of political reforms aimed at realizing a “New Algeria,” the President amended the constitution and held elections for the People’s National Assembly (lower house of parliament), and, in July 2021, appointed Prime Minister Aïmene Benabderrahmane to form a new cabinet.

2022 marked the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Algeria (see the Column on page 178), and various cultural and other events were held in Algeria, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. As the culmination of the anniversary, State Minister for Foreign Affairs YAMADA Kenji visited Algeria in December, as the first Japanese government official to visit the country at the political level in the last four years, and held meetings with Algerian government officials including Minister of Industry Afmad Zaghdar and Minister of Energy and Mines Mohamed Arkab.

In Morocco, the coalition cabinet led by the leader of the National Rally of Independents (RNI), Aziz Akhannouch, which was formed following the
September 2021 lower house elections, is focusing on implementing the “New Development Model” proposed by King Mohammed VI, in addition to reforms in health, education, social security, and taxes. In particular, a special plan was announced in February in response to rising food and energy prices triggered by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and aggravating water shortages.

Regarding Morocco’s relations with Japan, Foreign Minister Hayashi held a video conference meeting with Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita in September. Moreover, in the same month, Prime Minister Kishida held a summit meeting with Head of Government Akhannouch, who visited Japan to attend the state funeral of the late Prime Minister ABE Shinzo, where the two leaders confirmed they would further strengthen the cooperative relationship between the two countries in a broad range of fields. In December, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Yamada visited Morocco and held talks with Foreign Minister Bourita and Minister Delegate to the Head of Government in charge of Investment, Convergence and Evaluation of Public Policies Mohcine Jazouli.
60th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and Algeria

For many Japanese, the name Algeria may evoke the classic Japanese pop song “Woman from the Kasbah,” and its lyrics “this is the very end of the Earth, Algeria.” Algeria is located in North Africa, far away from Japan, but it is a land of diverse and stunning scenic beauty that has the largest land area on the African continent, features traces of the Roman Empire, French colonial-era, and Arabic architecture, and embraces the contrast of the vast Sahara Desert and cities on the glittering Mediterranean Sea coast.

During Algeria’s war of independence, the National Liberation Front (FLN), an organization that played a key role in Algeria’s independence, opened a Far East office in Tokyo. Therefore, Japan and Algeria have had connections since even before Algeria’s independence in 1962. The year 2022 marks the 60th anniversary of both Algeria’s independence and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Algeria.

In celebration of these milestones, a commemorative concert was held in Algiers on June 29 by Japanese harp (koto) musician MIYAZAKI Mieko, attended by representatives of the Government of Algeria, businesses, and journalists. Moreover, Japan was the guest of honor at the 14th edition of the Algiers International Comics Festival (Festival International de la Bande Dessinée d’Alger, FIBDA) in early October. A concert was also held featuring bamboo flute (shakuhachi) player CreaSion Katsura and three-stringed Japanese lute (Tsugaru shamisen) artist SAWADA Harugin (Sylvain Diony) playing together with an Algerian orchestra, enthralling large crowds with the beauty of their music. Japanese university professors and comic (manga) artists were also invited to FIBDA, engaging with local manga fans through symposiums and manga workshops. Finally, in November, two Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects and one Grant Assistance for Cultural Grassroots Project were implemented, including support for the Algerian Aikido Federation.

For 60 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations, the two countries have developed a relationship in wide-ranging areas, including political, economic, and cultural spheres. We hope to further deepen this relationship toward the future. Please visit the official Facebook page of the Embassy of Japan in Algeria [Note], which is updated periodically.

Note: Facebook page of the Embassy of Japan in Algeria: https://www.facebook.com/ambjpalger/