

Section 6

Russia and Belarus, Central Asia and the Caucasus

1 Overview

While Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which began in February 2022, continued in 2025, various developments were observed following the inauguration of the new Trump administration in the United States (U.S.) As the U.S. pursued its mediation efforts, direct negotiations between Russia and Ukraine were held for the first time in approximately three years. There were also exchanges at various levels between the U.S. and Russia, including at the summit and foreign ministers' level. In August, an in-person U.S.-Russia Summit Meeting was held in Alaska, U.S. for the first time in approximately four years. Yet no concrete breakthrough toward a resolution of the situation was achieved.

With its relations with Europe remaining extremely limited, Russia continued seeking to further strengthen its ties with China, North Korea, and the developing and emerging countries known as the Global South, including India. Of particular note are the facts that Russia invited President Xi Jinping as its guest of honor to the ceremony for the 80th Anniversary of the Victory over Nazi Germany, and also invited a large number of leaders from Global South countries and others; that Russia further advanced its cooperation with North Korea, including military cooperation; and that President Vladimir Putin of Russia visited India for the first time in four years. Russia, together with China, has emphasized the building of a multipolar world order.

Belarus has maintained a posture of cooperation with Russia, including references to the deployment of Russian tactical nuclear weapons and the new intermediate-range ballistic missile "Oreshnik" in Belarus.

In terms of relations with the U.S., changes were also observed. Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko and U.S. President Donald J. Trump held their first telephone call in August, and the U.S. partially lifted its sanctions against Belarus.

Regarding Central Asian and Caucasus countries, while they have close historical and economic ties with Russia, they have maintained a neutral stance toward Russia's aggression against Ukraine (excluding Georgia, which has expressed support for Ukraine). Meanwhile, they are also struggling to cope with the impact on transportation routes for energy and other trade items and remittances from migrant workers in Russia.

Amid this situation, the international community is paying close attention to the Central Asian and Caucasus countries. In 2025, amid summit meetings held by the European Union (EU), Italy, China, Russia, and the U.S. with the Central Asian countries, Japan held the Summit of the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue (CA+JAD) — a cooperation framework with the Central Asian countries — in Tokyo in December, for the first time at the leaders' level.

Regarding the Caucasus region, positive developments were seen, including the signing in August by the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia of a joint declaration toward a peace agreement to end a conflict spanning more than 30 years, witnessed by President Trump of the U.S. With regard to Georgia, the Georgian government announced in November 2024 that it would not begin the EU accession process until the end of 2028, and tensions with the EU have continued.

2 Russia and Belarus

(1) Situation in Russia

A Internal Situation in Russia

As Russia's aggression against Ukraine (which Russia calls the “special military operation,” hereinafter referred to as the “operation”) has surpassed three years, President Putin's approval rating has continued to remain at a high level, and various measures related to the “operation” have been observed.

As part of efforts to secure personnel for the aggression against Ukraine, the recruitment of contract soldiers has continued, and a decision has been made to shift regular conscription — previously conducted twice a year in spring and autumn — to a year-round basis in order to streamline conscription-related procedures. In addition, a law was enacted allowing for the special call-up of certain citizens for the defense of domestic facilities during peacetime.

In the nationwide local elections held in September, a large number of “operation” participants were fielded as candidates, particularly at the municipal level. In particular, more than 800 “operation” participants fielded by the ruling party “United Russia” were elected, which was more than double the number from the previous year.

Furthermore, the Russian government's restrictions on freedom of speech and the press have continued. In September, a federal law entered into force that, among other measures, imposes fines for searching for “extremist content.” In addition, since August, certain functions of foreign-made messaging applications that have been widely used within Russia have been restricted, while the use of the Russian-made messenger app “MAX” has been promoted.

B Russian Foreign Policy

Following the inauguration of U.S. President Trump, who had expressed his eagerness to mediate a ceasefire in Ukraine, direct discussions between Russia and Ukraine — the first since 2022 — took place in

Istanbul, Türkiye in May. (Bilateral talks were subsequently held in Istanbul again in June and July.) Although exchanges of prisoners of war and human remains took place, the gap in positions on peace could not be bridged.

In terms of relations with the U.S., with which high-level dialogue had been almost cut off since the start of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, numerous exchanges at various levels — including at the summit and foreign ministers' level — were held after the inauguration of the Trump administration. In August, the U.S.-Russia Summit Meeting was held in Alaska, U.S., but Russia has since repeatedly reiterated its longstanding position that the “root causes” must be eliminated to resolve the situation in Ukraine, and no concrete breakthrough toward a resolution of the situation was achieved. In October, the U.S. introduced additional sanctions against two major Russian oil companies as the first direct sanctions against Russia by the second Trump administration.

In September, President Putin stated that Russia was prepared to comply with the quantitative limits of the Treaty between the U.S. and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START Treaty) for one additional year beyond the deadline of February 2026, but no official response from the U.S. side toward the extension of the Treaty was observed. The New START Treaty reached its expiration date and expired. Furthermore, in October, Russia announced the successful testing of the nuclear-powered cruise missile “Burevestnik” and the nuclear-powered unmanned underwater drone weapon “Poseidon,” and in November, announced plans to deploy the new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) “Sarmat” in 2026.

In terms of relations with European countries, the EU has been strengthening its sanctions against Russia, including by lowering the price cap under the oil price cap system,⁽¹⁾ stepping up its response to the “Shadow

(1) A measure that prohibits services related to the maritime transportation, etc., of Russian crude oil and oil products that exceed a certain price, while the provision of such services is not subject to prohibition if the price is at or below a certain level.

Fleet,”⁽²⁾ and banning the import of Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG) from January 2027 onwards. In 2025, relevant countries have announced that airspace violations by Russian military aircraft and by drones suspected of Russian involvement occurred in multiple North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member countries.

Russia continues seeking to further strengthen its ties with China, North Korea, and Global South countries including India. Furthermore, President Putin has repeatedly emphasized the importance of multi-lateral frameworks such as BRICS⁽³⁾ and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in the international community.

In May, Russia held a military parade commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Victory over Nazi Germany, with the participation of many foreign leaders including those from Africa and Latin America. President Xi Jinping attended as the guest of honor. The joint leaders' statement issued following the China-Russia summit contained many passages asserting the historical contributions of both countries on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. From late August through September, President Putin visited China, held a China-Russia summit meeting, and attended the “Ceremony Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War,” where President Putin, President Xi, and President Kim Jong Un of North Korea were seen standing side by side.

On the military front, the Chinese and Russian navies conducted the joint exercise “Maritime Cooperation — 2025” in the Sea of Japan from August 1 to 5, after which Chinese and Russian naval vessels conducted joint navigation in the Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean. On December 9, Chinese and Russian bombers conducted joint flights over the East China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. The strengthening

of China-Russia military cooperation must continue to be closely monitored with serious concern from the perspective of Japan's security.

Regarding relations with North Korea, in late April, both Russia and North Korea publicly announced that North Korean soldiers had participated in combat in Russia's Kursk Oblast, into which Ukraine had been advancing since August 2024. In addition, North Korea has been providing Russia with ballistic missiles and ammunition, and there are also deep concerns that there may be nuclear-and missile-related technology transferred from Russia to North Korea in return. High-level meetings have continued as well. At the summit level, following the Russia-North Korea summit telephone call in August, a summit meeting was held in Beijing, China in September, at which President Putin stated that relations between the two “countries” had come to take on a dimension of alliance.

Regarding relations with India, President Putin of Russia visited India in December for the first time in four years.

C Russian Economy

Since the start of the aggression against Ukraine, Russia's defense spending has accounted for a large share of the federal budget. In the federal budget for 2026, there was none of the significant expansion of defense spending that had been seen for the previous three consecutive years. For the first time since the aggression against Ukraine, the nominal amount of defense spending fell below the previous year's level. However, it still accounts for approximately 30% of the overall budget, placing strain on the federal budget. The fiscal deficit has also been expanding, and the government plans tax increases such as raising the value-added tax (VAT) rate from 20% to 22% in 2026, citing defense and security needs.

Some slowdown is also observed in domestic economic growth. With regard to the real GDP growth

(2) The “Shadow Fleet” refers to vessels engaged in illicit operations for the purpose of evading sanctions, safety and environmental regulations, and insurance costs, or for other illegal activities (IMO Resolution A.1192(33), para. 1, December 2023).

(3) BRICS: A term referring to a group consisting of countries such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, and other countries. At the inaugural foreign ministers' meeting in 2006 and the inaugural summit meeting in 2009, the original four countries — Brazil, Russia, India, and China — participated. South Africa joined in 2011, giving the grouping its current name, BRICS. In 2024, Egypt, Ethiopia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran joined as Member Countries, followed by Indonesia in 2025. At the summit meeting in October 2024, a new category of “BRICS Partner Countries” was introduced, and it was announced that Belarus, Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Malaysia, Thailand, Uganda, Uzbekistan, and Nigeria joined as Partner Countries from January 2025, with Viet Nam's accession as a Partner Country announced in June of the same year.

rate, which had exceeded 4% in 2024, Russia's Ministry of Economic Development revised its forecast for 2025 downward in September from 2.5% to 1% year-on-year. In addition, amid frequent Ukrainian drone attacks on oil refineries and seasonal increases in demand, concerns arose about shortages of gasoline and diesel, and the government implemented counter-measures such as a full ban on gasoline exports and the extension of trading restrictions.

Sanctions have significantly reduced energy exports to Europe, but Russia's friendly countries including China continue to import Russian energy. In August, U.S. President Trump imposed additional 25% tariffs (so-called "secondary tariffs") on India, citing its imports of oil from Russia, and in October, the U.S. introduced sanctions against two major Russian oil companies — the first direct sanctions against Russia by the Trump administration. As Western countries strengthen export controls, Russia continues to pursue sanctions evasion measures, including advancing import substitution and continuing circumvention imports through friendly countries.

Domestic labor shortages and restrictions on access to Western advanced components could affect the growth of the Russian economy in the medium- to long term.

(2) Japan-Russia Relations

A Overview

Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which began in February 2022, continues to have a serious impact on Japan-Russia relations. In order to achieve a just and lasting peace in Ukraine as soon as possible, Japan, in cooperation with the international community including the G7, has been taking measures such as imposing severe sanctions against Russia. At the same time, there remain a host of pending issues that Japan and Russia must resolve as neighboring countries, and Japan has been appropriately responding to these from the perspective of what is in Japan's national interest. It will continue to be necessary to appropriately communicate with the Russian side.

With regard to fisheries, even after Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the Government of Japan has been holding discussions with Russia to maintain and secure Japan's interests related to fishing activities. In

2025, fishing operations were conducted under the "Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Mutual Relations in the Field of Fisheries off the coast of Both Countries" and the "Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics concerning cooperation in the fields of fisheries," as well as fishing operations based on the Kaigara Island Kelp Agreement, a private agreement. On the other hand, regarding the Framework Agreement Concerning Operations in the Waters Around the Four Northern Islands, despite repeated urging from the Japanese side, Russia has not concurred to the holding of inter-governmental consultations based on the agreement, and operations under the agreement have not been resumed.

Regarding security issues, following the intrusions into Japan's territorial airspace three times by a Russian military aircraft over Japanese territorial waters north of Rebun Island in Hokkaido in September 2024, the Government of Japan lodged a very severe protest with the Russian government and urged that it investigate the cause and prevent a recurrence of such intrusions. Japan has also conveyed serious concerns to the Russian government about the continued joint operations between the Chinese and Russian militaries around Japan.

On the subject of cultural and people-to-people exchanges, Japan is conducting projects within an appropriate scope that includes accepting Russian students by the Japanese Government (Monbukagakusho: MEXT Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports) Scholarship and providing Japanese language education in Russia based on the belief that it is important to maintain contact with Russian civil society, especially the younger generation, and to provide Russian citizens with opportunities to gain international perspectives.

The Japan Centers have been in operation for more than 30 years, and amid major changes in the situation within Russia and surrounding Japan-Russia relations, the Government of Japan decided in August 2025 to terminate their operations and close them, based on a comprehensive judgment that they had sufficiently fulfilled their historic role. It should be noted that, in making the decision to close the Centers, the unilateral decision by the Russian government in January of the

same year to terminate the application of the memoranda between the Japanese and Russian governments concerning the Japan Centers was also an important factor in the consideration.

B The Northern Territories Issue and Negotiations on a Peace Treaty

The greatest concern between Japan and Russia is the Northern Territories issue. The Northern Territories are islands over which Japan has sovereignty. The islands are an inherent territory of Japan but are currently illegally occupied by Russia. The Northern Territories issue is yet to be resolved even after 80 years have passed since the end of World War II, and the Government of Japan has firmly worked on the negotiations under the policy of concluding a peace treaty through the resolution of the issue of the attribution of the Four Northern Islands.⁽⁴⁾

However, in March 2022, the Government of Russia, considering the measures taken by Japan in relation to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, announced measures such as discontinuing negotiations on a peace treaty, suspending Free Visits and the Four-Island exchange program, and withdrawing from the dialogue on joint economic activities on the Four Northern Islands. In September, the Government of Russia also announced a government decree suspending the validity of the agreement on Free Visits and the Four-Island exchange program.

The current situation is entirely the result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and Russia's attempt to shift responsibility to Japan is extremely unjust and absolutely unacceptable, and the government has lodged a strong protest against the Russian side.

Although Japan-Russia relations are in a difficult situation due to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, it remains the policy of the Government of Japan to conclude a peace treaty through the resolution of the issue of the attribution of the Four Northern Islands.

In addition, the Four-Island exchange program,⁽⁵⁾ Free Visits, and Visits to Graves in the Northern Territories have not been conducted since 2020 due

to the impact of COVID-19 and the deterioration of Japan-Russia relations following Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Resuming the Four-Island exchange program, Free Visits, and Visits to Graves in the Northern Territories is one of the highest priorities in Japan-Russia relations. In light of the earnest wishes of the elderly former residents of the islands, the resumption of Visits to Graves in the Northern Territories is an eminently humanitarian matter, and the Government of Japan will continue to strongly urge the Russian side to resume these programs, with particular emphasis on Visits to Graves in the Northern Territories.

Japan has also lodged protests against Russia over Russia's moves to build up its military forces in the Four Northern Islands and surrounding waters, including military exercises, stating that these moves are contrary to Japan's position concerning these islands and unacceptable.

C Japan-Russia Economic Relations

Since Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Japan has continued its policy of suspending, for the time being, government projects related to economic cooperation with Russia while imposing severe sanctions against the country.

Against this backdrop, trade between Japan and Russia contracted significantly compared to before the start of the aggression. Japan-Russia trade from January through December 2025 amounted to approximately 1,195.1 billion Japanese yen, a decrease of 50.5% from the same period in 2021, before the start of the aggression (Japan-Russia trade during the same period was approximately 2,413.9 billion Japanese yen). Of this, exports from Russia to Japan fell 46.6% (especially in coal), and exports from Japan to Russia fell by 57.5% during the same period in 2021 (all sources: Trade Statistics, Ministry of Finance).

With regard to sanctions against Russia, Japan, in cooperation with the international community including the G7, has maintained and strengthened severe sanctions against Russia in order to demonstrate that outrageous acts that shake the very foundations of

(4) Refer to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website for the position of the Government of Japan on the Northern Territories issue: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/russia/territory/index.html>

(5) Refers to Visits to Graves in the Northern Territories, Free Visits, and exchange visits/receptions to the Four Northern Islands (including receiving patients and expert exchanges).

(4)



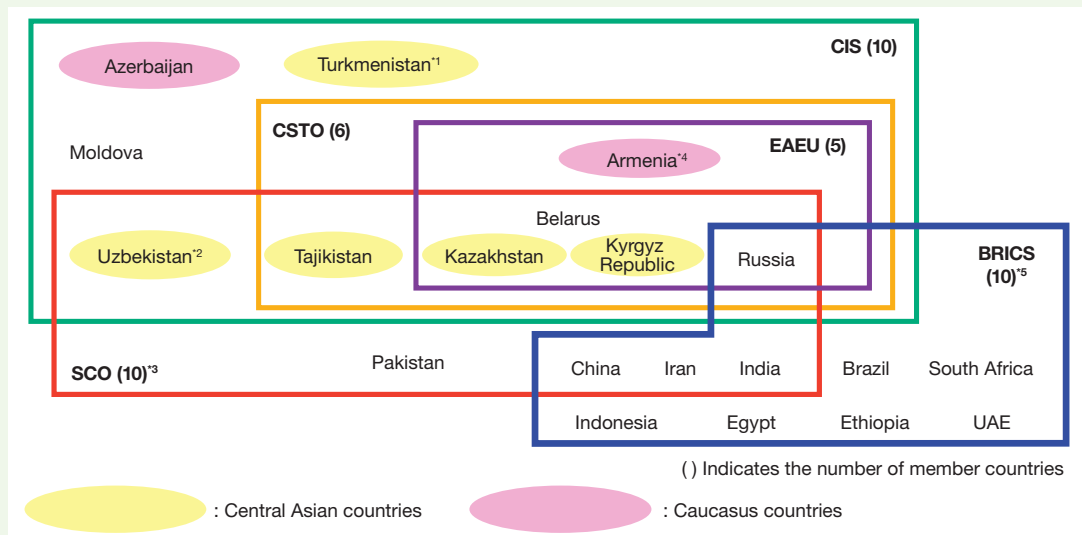
the international order come with a high price. These include sanctions against individuals and organizations in Russia and occupied territories, including Russian government and military officials. They also include sanctions in the financial sector, including the freezing of bank assets and measures prohibiting imports and exports, among others. Japan and like-minded countries, such as those in the G7, introduced a price cap system for Russian crude oil in December 2022 and for Russian oil products in February 2023, with the aim of stabilizing international oil prices while reducing Russia's energy revenues. Furthermore, based on a recognition of the importance of ensuring the effectiveness of sanctions, since December 2023, the Government of Japan has also been introducing sanctions measures against entities in third countries suspected of involvement in the circumvention or evasion of sanctions.

In 2025 as well, Japan maintained its basic policy of continuing sanctions against Russia, and introduced additional sanctions in January and September. These

measures include additional sanctions against entities in third countries suspected of involvement in the circumvention or evasion of sanctions, as well as against individuals and entities involved in Russia-North Korea cooperation in support of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. In September, Japan, in step with like-minded countries, lowered the price cap under the price cap system for Russian crude oil.

Regarding the energy sector, the Government of Japan intends to phase out its dependence on Russian energy, including coal and oil, and will take this step in a manner that minimizes adverse effects on Japanese people's lives and business activities. However, the government policy remains focused on maintaining Japan's interests in the "Sakhalin 1" and "Sakhalin 2" oil and natural gas development projects in Russia, as these projects are important to Japan's energy security from the perspective of ensuring a stable supply over the medium- to long-term.

■ Major Frameworks involving Russia, Central Asia, and Caucasus countries



<Note>

*1 Turkmenistan has been an associate member of the CIS since 2005.

*2 Uzbekistan ceased its membership in the CSTO in 2012.

*3 Iran officially joined the SCO in 2023.

*4 Armenia has announced that it will freeze its participation in the CSTO in 2024.

*5 Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan became "Partner Countries" of BRICS from January 2025.

<Abbreviations>

CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) (10)

CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) (6)

EAEU (Eurasian Economic Union) (5)

SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) (10)

(3) Situation in Belarus

Although Belarus did not take part in Russia's aggression against Ukraine, it supported Russian military operations through the use of its territory at the beginning of the aggression. In response to this, Western countries strengthened sanctions against Belarus, while Japan also implemented sanctions against Belarus.

In internal politics, President Lukashenko won his seventh term in the presidential election held in January. In the election, candidates with anti-government positions were not allowed to run, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) election observer mission could not be dispatched; European countries pointed out problems such as the lack of democratic procedures.

In foreign policy, President Lukashenko keeps close relationship with Russia, frequently meeting with Russian President Putin. Moves to restrain Western countries have also been observed, such as the joint military exercise “Zapad 2025” with Russia in September, during which Belarus announced that operational training with Russian tactical nuclear weapons and the

new intermediate-range ballistic missile “Oreshnik” had been conducted.

Moves to strengthen relations with countries and regions close to Russia were also observed, including two visits to China by President Lukashenko in 2025 and a visit to Belarus by Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui of North Korea. Meanwhile, there were some changes in the Belarus-U.S. relationship. President Lukashenko held his first telephone call with U.S. President Trump in August. As a result of negotiations with the U.S., the Belarusian government released many foreign detainees, including Japanese nationals, on multiple occasions, and the U.S. also partially lifted its sanctions against Belarus.

Attempts of illegal border crossings from Belarus into neighboring countries by irregular migrants from Middle Eastern and African countries, which began in 2021, have continued, although the scale has decreased. In addition, in October, Lithuania temporarily sealed its border with Belarus, following several incidents of airport closures caused by balloons flying in from the Belarusian side.

3 Central Asian and Caucasus countries

(1) Overview

Central Asian and Caucasus countries are situated in a location of geopolitical importance that connects East Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Russia, and have abundant energy and mineral resources such as oil, natural gas, uranium, and rare metals. The stability of the entire region, including Central Asia and the Caucasus countries, has also been of great importance in addressing key issues the international community is facing, such as the fight against terrorism and drug problems.

In the wake of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Central Asian and Caucasus countries that have close historical and economic ties with Russia have each been forced to take a cautious approach. Central Asian and Caucasus countries have been absent from or abstained from voting on UN General Assembly resolutions related to the aggression against Ukraine, with the exception of Georgia, which has expressed support for Ukraine, and many of these countries have avoided

making their positions clear externally. Meanwhile, Japan and the five Central Asian countries have concurred, seizing various opportunities including the framework of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue, on the importance of upholding the Charter of the UN and other international laws, which includes respecting the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of all countries and peacefully settling disputes.

Japan and the Central Asian and Caucasus countries have traditionally maintained friendly relations. Following the independence of these countries upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Japan was among the first to establish diplomatic relations, and continues its efforts to strengthen bilateral relations with Central Asian and Caucasus countries through high-level dialogues, economic cooperation, and other means.

In addition, in light of the current international situation, the importance of the “Trans-Caspian International Transport Route,” a transportation route linking Central Asia and Europe, is attracting

increasing attention from Central Asian and Caucasus countries as well as Western countries. Japan is also focusing on enhancing connectivity within the region, and from Central Asia to the world and promoting economic cooperation, including facilitating logistics by speeding up customs clearance.

In recent years, there has also been a growing movement among Central Asian countries and neighboring countries to promote regional cooperation. In 2025, there were a number of meetings attended by the leaders of Central Asian countries, including a Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit meeting (August), a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) summit meeting (October), and a Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) summit meeting (November). In addition, between the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan, a treaty on the border was signed in March, representing the fruition of years of negotiations through constructive dialogue between the two governments on their border, which had remained undelimited since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Between Armenia and Azerbaijan, in August, the leaders of the two countries signed a joint declaration toward a peace agreement to end a conflict spanning more than 30 years, witnessed by President Trump of the U.S. In response, Japan issued a Foreign Minister's Statement welcoming the signing of the declaration, and expressed high appreciation for the mediation efforts by the U.S., including by President Trump, as well as expectation that the signing of the document would lead to the achievement of peace and ultimately a final resolution of the conflict between the two countries, bringing lasting peace and prosperity to the Caucasus region. Georgia regards EU and NATO membership as foreign policy priorities. While the European Council granted Georgia the status of an EU candidate country in December 2023, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced in November 2024 that Georgia would not begin the EU accession process until the end of 2028. This prompted citizens supporting EU accession to launch large-scale protest activities, which led to clashes with security forces and many arrests and injuries. Japan issued a Press Secretary's

Statement expressing concerns over the situation and urging the Georgian government to exercise restraint to avoid a further deterioration of the situation and expressing Japan's hope that the Georgian government would take a constructive approach that would gain the understanding of its people and that the situation would calm down as soon as possible. It should be noted that problems exist regarding South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Georgia has severed diplomatic relations with Russia.

(2) Central Asian Countries

The countries of Central Asia are partners of Japan in maintaining and strengthening a free and open international order, and Japan is promoting diplomacy aimed at contributing to peace and stability in Central Asia.

Japan launched the framework of the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue (CA+JAD) in 2004, based on the recognition that interregional cooperation is indispensable for the development of Central Asia. With Japan playing a catalytic role, the framework promotes intraregional cooperation with the Central Asian countries as the main actors. Japan and the Central Asian countries have promoted cooperation in various fields including politics, economy, and people-to-people exchanges, through up to ten Foreign Ministers' Meetings including online meetings, Senior Officials Meetings (SOM), and business dialogues by government officials, expert meetings on topics such as drug control and border management, and tourism, as well as the Tokyo Dialogue (an open symposium by experts) on topics such as connectivity with Central Asia and the Caucasus. In addition, in February 2025, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan invited law enforcement officials from the five Central Asian countries to Japan and held the "Central Asian Counter Terrorism Workshop: Building Cooperation and Coordination to Promote the Rule of Law," confirming cooperation in international counter-terrorism measures.

In recent years, the international community has shown increasing interest in strengthening relations with the Central Asian countries, and with the U.S., the EU, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC),⁽⁶⁾

(6) GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council): Established in 1981 by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait. Its purpose is to promote coordination, integration, and cooperation among participating countries in all fields, including defense and the economy.

China, Russia, India, Germany, and Italy holding summit meetings with the Central Asian countries, Japan held the Summit of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue (CA+JAD) for the first time in December 2025. (See the Column on page 165) At the summit the leaders of the six countries adopted a Joint Declaration (Tokyo Declaration) where the “CA+JAD Tokyo Initiative” for a mutually beneficial relationship to support the industrial upgrading and diversification of Central Asia have been launched and “Green and Resilience,” “Connectivity,” and “Human Resource Development” are announced as the three priority areas of cooperation. Prior to the summit, from January through February, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister NAGASHIMA Akihisa visited the five Central Asian countries as Special Envoy of the Prime Minister, and exchanged views on cooperation toward the Summit of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue and bilateral relations through meetings with the foreign ministers and other officials of each country, and courtesy calls to the Presidents of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In addition, in August, Foreign Minister Iwaya visited Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and concurred to hold the Summit of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue at an early date. Japan will continue to strengthen its relations with Central Asia through high-level dialogues and other means. Regarding relations with Uzbekistan, in August, Head of the Department of Creative Economy and Tourism of the Presidential Administration Gayane Umelova visited Japan on the occasion of Uzbekistan's National Day at the Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan. Furthermore, in the same month, Foreign Minister Iwaya of Japan visited Uzbekistan, held the first-ever Japan-Uzbekistan

Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue with Foreign Minister Bakhtiyor Saidov, and paid a courtesy call on President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and others. At the Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue, the two sides discussed cooperation toward the early holding of the Summit of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue and bilateral relations, and after the meeting, the Joint Communiqué of the First Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue was signed by the two foreign ministers, and letters were signed and exchanged regarding the Grant Aid project “Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship” and the “Project for Promoting Economic Activities in Surkhandarya Region through Supporting Self-reliance of Vulnerable People including Afghan People.” In December, a summit meeting was held between President Mirziyoyev, who visited Japan to attend the Summit of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue, and Prime Minister Takaichi, resulting in the announcement of a “Joint Statement on Expanded Strategic Partnership for future generations.” Prior to the Dialogue Summit, the Exchange of Notes regarding the Yen Loan “Livestock Promotion and Animal Health Enhancement Project” was signed and exchanged.

Regarding relations with Kazakhstan, in March, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Murat Nurtleu visited Japan as a guest of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, held a meeting with Foreign Minister Iwaya, and paid courtesy calls on Prime Minister Ishiba and Chief Cabinet Secretary HAYASHI Yoshimasa. In addition, Minister of Trade and Integration Arman Shakkaliyev visited Japan on the occasion of Kazakhstan's National Day at the Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan in August. Furthermore, in the same month, Foreign Minister Iwaya of Japan visited Kazakhstan, paid a courtesy call on President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and others, and held a Foreign Ministers' Meeting with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Murat Nurtleu, at which the two foreign ministers signed and exchanged the notes on grant aid for “the Economic and Social Development Programme” (support for nuclear test victims: provision of medical equipment). In December, a summit meeting was held between President Tokayev, who visited Japan to attend the Summit of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue, and Prime Minister Takaichi, and as an outcome, the “Joint Statement between the Republic of Kazakhstan



Courtesy call by Foreign Minister Iwaya on President Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan (August 27, Tashkent, Uzbekistan)



Courtesy call by Foreign Minister Iwaya on President Tokayev of Kazakhstan (August 25, Astana, Kazakhstan)

and Japan on Further Synergy of the Future-Oriented Expanded Strategic Partnership” was announced, and the two sides agreed to begin consultations toward the conclusion of an aviation agreement.

Regarding relations with the Kyrgyz Republic, Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet Edil Baisalov visited Japan on the occasion of the Kyrgyz Republic’s National Day at the Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan in June. In December, a summit meeting was held between President Sadyr Zhaparov, who visited Japan to attend the Summit of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue, and Prime Minister Takaichi, and as an outcome, the “Joint Statement on Further Development of Relations between Japan and the Kyrgyz Republic to Co-create Mutually Beneficial Cooperation” was announced. In addition, a meeting was held between Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeenbek Kulubayev, who accompanied the President, and Foreign Minister Motegi, and on this occasion, the “Cooperation Program between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2026–2027” and the Japan-Kyrgyz Republic Tax Agreement were signed.

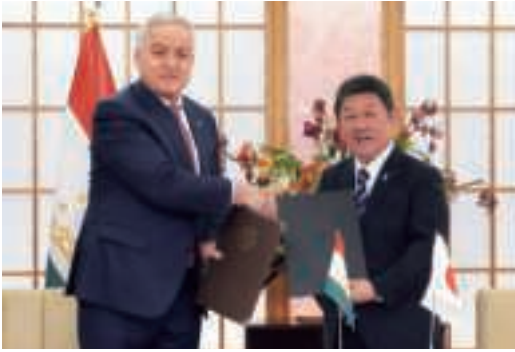
Regarding relations with Tajikistan, in May, State Minister for Foreign Affairs FUJII Hisayuki attended the “High-Level International Conference on Glaciers’ Preservation” held in Dushanbe as a representative of the Government of Japan, and held meetings with Foreign Minister Sirojiddin Muhriddin and other government officials, exchanging views on bilateral relations and other matters. First Deputy Prime Minister Hokim Kholiqzoda visited Japan on the occasion of Tajikistan’s National Day at the Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan in June. In addition, in the same month, the 3rd Meeting



Japan-Kyrgyz Foreign Ministers’ Meeting (December 19, Tokyo)

of the Japan-Tajikistan Intergovernmental Commission for Economic, Technological and Scientific Cooperation was held in Tokyo. In December, a summit meeting was held between President Emomali Rahmon, who visited Japan to attend the Summit of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue, and Prime Minister Takaichi, and as an outcome, the “Joint Statement between Japan and the Republic of Tajikistan on Further Development of Relations to Co-create Mutually Beneficial Cooperation” was announced. In addition, a Foreign Ministers’ Meeting was held between Minister Sirojiddin Muhriddin, who accompanied the President, and Foreign Minister Motegi, and on this occasion, the “Cooperation Program between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2026–2028” and the Japan-Tajikistan Investment Agreement were signed.

Regarding relations with Turkmenistan, in April, on the occasion of the Turkmenistan National Day — the first National Day Event of Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan — President of Turkmenistan Serdar Berdimuhamedov visited Japan and held a summit meeting with Prime Minister Ishiba, confirming that the two countries would work closely together toward deepening their bilateral relationship as a mutually beneficial partner based on friendship and mutual trust, with a joint press release issued as an outcome of the meeting. In November, the Japan-Turkmenistan Tax Convention entered into force. In December, President Berdimuhamedov, who visited Japan again to attend the Summit of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue, held a summit meeting with Prime Minister Takaichi, and a joint press release was issued as an outcome of the meeting.



Japan-Tajikistan Foreign Ministers' Meeting (December 19, Tokyo)



Japan-Turkmenistan Summit Meeting (December 20, Tokyo; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister's Office of Japan)

(3) Caucasus Countries

The Caucasus region has potential to be a gateway connecting Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, and geopolitical importance that directly affects the peace and stability of the international community. Japan announced the Caucasus Initiative in 2018, which

is comprised of two pillars: (a) assistance for human resources development for state building (human resources development) and (b) assistance for paving the way to “Appealing Caucasus” (infrastructure development and business environment improvement), and develops its diplomacy in line with this initiative.

Regarding relations with Azerbaijan, Assistant to the President Anar Alakbarov visited Japan on the occasion of Azerbaijan's National Day at the Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan in June. Assistant to the President Alakbarov met with Minister for the World Expo 2025 ITO Yoshitaka and Special Advisor to the Prime Minister Nagashima, and they had discussions aimed at further strengthening bilateral relations.

Regarding relations with Armenia, Prime Minister Ishiba held a summit meeting with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who visited Japan on the occasion of Armenia's National Day at the Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan in September, welcoming the signing of the joint declaration toward a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and expressing expectations for the achievement of peace. In addition, in December, the Japan-Armenia Tax Convention entered into force.

Regarding relations with Georgia, in December, Commissioner of the Japan Sports Agency KAWAI Junichi received a courtesy call from Minister of Sports Shalva Gogoladze, and exchanged views on bilateral cooperation on sports.

Column

Summit of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue

On December 20, the first-ever Summit of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue (CA+JAD) was held in Tokyo. The meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Takaichi, and attended by President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Sadyr Zhaparov, President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, President of Turkmenistan, Serdar Berdimuhamedov and President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

Twenty-one years have passed since Japan pioneered the establishment of CA+JAD in 2004 as a dialogue mechanism with the Central Asian countries, ahead of other nations. At this Summit Meeting, discussions were held on the importance and potential of the Central Asian region and on cooperation with Japan, against the backdrop of changes in the international situation within and surrounding the region during this period. Prime Minister Takaichi highlighted the importance and potential of the Central Asian region, including (a) its geopolitical significance as a junction between Europe and Asia, (b) its importance in economic security due to its energy and mineral resources, and (c) its potential with high economic growth and population increase. Building on these points, Prime Minister Takaichi declared, on the occasion of this Summit Meeting, the launch of the “CA+JAD Tokyo Initiative” to support the industrial advancement and diversification of the five Central Asian countries and strengthen the mutually

beneficial relationship between Japan and Central Asia. Specifically, Prime Minister Takaichi announced that Japan would promote mutually beneficial projects centered on the three priority areas of cooperation newly identified on this occasion: (a) Green and Resilience (examples: cooperation on energy transition, disaster risk reduction, and climate change measures; strengthening of critical minerals supply chains); (b) Connectivity (examples: Enhancing Connectivity through Support for the Further Development of the “Trans-Caspian International Transport Route”; Launch of the “Japan-Central Asia AI Cooperation Partnership”); and (c) Human resource development (examples: continuation of the Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship (JDS) and others; cooperation in the health and medical fields).

The leaders of the Central Asian countries expressed gratitude for Japan’s cooperation and support in the three priority cooperation areas, and showed their willingness to form mutually beneficial projects between Japan and Central Asia.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Tokyo Declaration of the Summit of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue (Tokyo Declaration) was adopted. In addition, more than 150 documents were signed and presented by both the public and private sectors.



Group photo at the Summit of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialogue (December 20, Tokyo; Photo: Official Website of the Prime Minister’s Office of Japan)



CA+JAD image character life-size panel ©MORI Kaoru

It is expected that Japan’s relations with Central Asia will be further strengthened through the Summit Meeting as well as the bilateral summit meetings held separately with each of the five Central Asian countries.



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