

Japanese Policies in Relation to Kazakhstan: Is There a “Strategy”?

Dedicated to the memory of the Honorable Ambassador Tanaka Kenji¹

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Despite Japan’s varied ties with Kazakhstan and the attention given Japan in the Kazakh press, to the Kazakhs Japan remains a passive player and its influence largely invisible. Each year the number of Japanese working in Central Asia increases, but neither they nor the policymakers back home provide a clear description of Japanese strategy in this region. Why, to this day, has Japan not worked out its strategy? For the sake of which interests, if not strategic, is Japan attempting to strengthen relations with Central Asia? What hinders Japan and Kazakhstan from developing their ties? And, in the end, is it appropriate to evaluate Japanese diplomacy always from the “strategic” point of view?

THE UNDERDEVELOPMENT OF “STRATEGIC” THINKING IN JAPANESE DIPLOMACY

Strategic thinking is lacking not only in Japan’s policy in Central Asia, but, as often noted, throughout its foreign policy. Before the Second World War Japan’s policy was rich with “strategy” and intrigue aimed at developing the Japanese Empire’s sphere of influence, but defeat in war fundamentally changed the orientation of Japanese diplomacy. Japan, to a great extent, lost its military and diplomatic independence. The major priority became maintaining its alliance with the United States, despite occasional and ongoing differences with the United States in the sphere of economics. At the same time, in order to prevent a slide back into iso-

¹ Mr. Tanaka met an untimely end in Almaty in April 2001. Here and further, when Japanese personal names are used, the surname will come first, then the given name.

lationism, Japan has attempted to maintain peaceful (although not necessarily close) relations with all countries of the world and, in particular, to avoid upsetting any of the superpowers or any of its neighboring countries. As a result, Japanese foreign policy has remained largely passive. Thus, for example, military problems are considered only in the framework of the Japanese-American alliance. Nor does Japan have its own vision of security in regions far from Japan, including Central Asia.

Yet, as a result of Japan's emergence as an economic giant, pressure has grown from both outside and inside for Japan to play a more active role in the world arena. At the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, many Japanese began to think about the role of their country in the new multi-polar world. In contrast to Germany, however, which from the beginning played an important diplomatic role with former socialist countries and in European integration, Japan has been unable to take a comparable diplomatic initiative, partly because of the situation in its immediate region. In East Asia, a regional cold war tied to the Korean, Taiwanese, and other problems continues. The situation in neighboring countries is not simple, and neither are relations between them and Japan. Second, the end of the cold war coincided with the beginning of a protracted economic recession in Japan, leaving many Japanese preoccupied with internal problems. While Japan has not experienced a catastrophic drop in production, and the standard of living remains high, the fact that after forty years of accelerated growth Japan has suffered ten years of economic stagnation, with no end in sight, causes great shock and uncertainty about the future. In such a situation, it is hard to focus on foreign policy.

The appearance of independent governments in the former Soviet Union, and particularly in Central Asia, has naturally caught the attention of the Japanese, yet Japanese politicians and officials have not reacted to this new phenomenon quickly or adroitly. Japan opened embassies and invited the heads of the new Central Asian governments to Japan later than the United States and some other countries. (The Japanese embassy in Kazakhstan opened in January 1993, and President Nursultan Nazarbaev first visited Japan in April 1994).

In a July 24, 1997 speech, then-Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro committed Japan to a new "Eurasian diplomacy."² The term was, more

² Website of the Prime Minister of Japan
[<http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/0731douyukai.html>]

than anything, an expression of Hashimoto's determination to improve relations with Russia and overcome the difficulties associated with the Northern Territories dispute (the contested islands of Itrup, Kunashiri, the Habomais, and Shikotan). However, intending to place Japanese-Russian relations in the larger framework of Japanese diplomacy, he declared that Japan would in the future actively develop relations also with China, Central Asia, and Transcaucasia. The last two regions he called the "regions of the Silk Road," and he enumerated three main tasks: the pursuit of a political dialogue aimed at raising mutual trust and understanding; economic cooperation and the development of natural resources in ways facilitating regional prosperity; and the promotion of peace by way of democratization, stabilization, and nonproliferation of nuclear weapons. These principles, however, abstract as they were, more resembled slogans than a strategy. In this regard, Hashimoto had not pushed Japan onto a new path, but had rather re-emphasized pre-existing objectives. Nevertheless, the notion of a "Eurasian diplomacy" drew attention to this region and served as the basis for the further development of Japan's Central Asian diplomacy.

At the same time, as part of its current "administrative reform," the government has gradually decreased its staff, and as a result is not in a position to strengthen the organizational foundation of "Eurasian diplomacy." All the CIS countries except Russia are the responsibility of a small department for the newly independent states in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). In Central Asia, Japan had embassies only in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan before recently opening one in Tajikistan. Some say (although others deny it), that Japanese diplomats do not consider assignments to the countries of Central Asia as prestigious as work in many other developing countries. They also point to the fact that almost all employees of the department of newly independent states (NIS) and its embassies, other than the ambassadors, are "non-career" diplomats,³ something that hinders their taking initiative. To the credit of those who work in this area, however, they have managed, with great effort and despite the cutbacks, to create a division for the NIS and to

³ Japanese diplomats are divided into first ("career"), or second and third ("non-career") categories, dependent on which exam they passed when entering the MFA. Diplomats of the first category rise up the career ladder more quickly than diplomats of the second or third categories.

staff embassies. Moreover, many of these employees work with great enthusiasm. The embassy in Kazakhstan often undertakes measures to familiarize Kazakhs with Japanese culture (movies, ikebana, music, traditional sports, and the like). In January 2001, the Japanese embassy was the first among developed countries to open an office in the new capital of Astana.

In principle, many Japanese now understand that Japan should not limit itself to relations with states that are traditionally important to it, such as the United States and countries of East and Southeast Asia, but should pay attention to all regions of the world, including Central Asia. For the moment, however, no consensus exists on how actively it should be involved in such regions.

There is still another characteristic trait of Japan's Central Asian policy—its dependence on chance and personal influence. In the beginning of the 1990s, when relations between Japan and Central Asia began to develop, government officials did not have a clear perception of this region, and much depended on a few high-placed bureaucrats who took it upon themselves to shape policy. For example, Edamura Sumio, Japan's well-known ambassador to Russia, actively pushed for strengthening ties with Kyrgyzstan. Not much later, an employee of Japan's Central Bank, Tanaka Tetsuji, became an advisor to the president of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev, and also lobbied on its behalf. In the case of Uzbekistan, Chino Tadao, at the time an influential figure in the Ministry of Finance and now the president of the Asian Development Bank, Magosaki Ukeru, Japan's first ambassador to Uzbekistan, and Shima Nobuhiko, a prominent TV news personality and head of the Japanese-Uzbekistan Association, all actively promoted stronger ties with this country. Long after Chino's departure from the Ministry of Finance, it continues to give special attention to Uzbekistan. While these people were acting out of genuine policy concerns, they were also responding to the warm reception given them by the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks; indeed, they simply liked Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Recently, in similar fashion, parliamentary deputies Takemi Keizo and Suzuki Muneo have begun working to speed the development of relations with Tajikistan.

Kazakhstan, in contrast, has not found such "patrons." The problem traces back to the first major visit of a Japanese delegation to Kazakhstan in May 1992. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Watanabe Michio arrived for a scheduled meeting with Nazarbaev, only

to be kept waiting for a very long time. Watanabe, an influential politician, returned home with a bad impression of Kazakhstan. Nor did the Kazakh side, according to a number of Japanese observers, subsequently display particular enthusiasm for developing ties with Japan. Hospitality for other Japanese politicians and officials who later visited Kazakhstan was not much warmer. Although it seems that the Kazakhs meant no disrespect to the Japanese and the perceived mistreatment was probably a result of carelessness, Japanese politicians and officials are very sensitive to slights of this sort.

Furthermore, romanticism also influences the Japanese perception of Central Asia. The Japanese often associate this region with the “Silk Road,” the route that passed from Japan through Korea, China, Central Asia, and Iran all the way to Rome. Novels and paintings of the of the Silk Road enjoy great popularity in Japan, and Hirayama Ikuo, the famous artist who has produced thousands of paintings of the Silk Road, is actively working for the development of relations between Japan and Central Asia. Some cynically assert that Japan simply wishes to make Central Asia a safe area for tourists to indulge their curiosity about those places where, in antiquity, caravans passed, transferring goods and products of art from West Asia to Japan. In reality, however, only fragmentary evidence of ancient ties between Japan and Central Asia exists, and many Japanese historians remain dubious about the significance of the Silk Road.

The point is that, if Japan had had clear goals in relation to Central Asia, these accidental encounters and manifestations of romanticism would not exert such a strong influence. The nature of Japanese interest in Central Asia thus underscores the underdeveloped character of Japan’s strategy in the region.

LOW ECONOMIC INTEREST

The absence of a Japanese strategy can also be explained in economic terms. Japan’s close relations with the United States and countries of East and Southeast Asia are inseparably tied to large economic interests. In Central Asia, by contrast, Japan’s economic interests are limited and do not serve as a major motivating force of Japanese policy, as Watanabe Koji correctly notes.⁴ Kazakhstan illustrates this point.

⁴ Watanabe Koji, “Japan and the New Central Asia,” in Sherman W. Garnett,

True, Japan has developed a close economic relationship with Kazakhstan; Japan is Kazakhstan's largest donor. As early as 1991, Japan began to offer various types of aid to Central Asia, and on Japan's initiative, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) included the countries of Central Asia in the list of countries eligible for official development assistance (ODA). In 1998, the sum of Japanese ODA to Kazakhstan equaled US \$95 million.⁵ This assistance aims to train officials and improve institutions necessary for democratization and the transition to a market economy; to develop infrastructure, especially in transportation and communication; to support health care and education; and to protect the environment.

Japan has also extended Kazakhstan a series of loans to improve railroad construction (in particular, the border station "Friendship," bordering China), to construct a bridge over the River Irtysh in Semipalatinsk, to reconstruct the airport in Astana, and to renovate highways in the western part of Kazakhstan. Japan has also provided equipment to Kazakh institutions of higher education (especially for learning the Japanese language), as well as to theaters, hospitals, and other institutions. Furthermore, Japan often invites Kazakh officials, entrepreneurs, and students to participate in internships. Research into the prerequisites of economic development (for example, developing mineral and water resources) is also conducted in the framework of ODA.⁶ Finally, Japan has worked with international organizations in offering financial aid to Kazakhstan.

Little of this, however, is done in pursuit of economic objectives. ODA, in this instance, has more to do with raising Japan's international prestige by way of investing in the development of other countries. Now we turn our attention to those issues that may be directly connected to Japan's economic interests.

Alexander Rahr, and Koji Watanabe, *The New Central Asia: In Search of Stability*, New York, Paris, and Tokyo: The Trilateral Commission, 2000, pp. 39, 45–49.

⁵ Web-site of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs [http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/00_hakusho/table_text/h_B127.html].

⁶ Web-site of the Japanese Embassy in the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK) [<http://www.jpemb.kz/en/relation/oda/index.html>].

Japan imports almost all of its oil from overseas. Eighty-seven percent of its imported crude oil (in FY2000) comes from the Middle East, in particular, the Persian Gulf. In order to decrease its dependence on the Middle East, Japan must find other sources of imports, including the Caspian region. The Japan National Oil Corporation (JNOC), Itochu, Mitsui, the Japan National Oil Exploration Co., Ltd. (JAPEX), and other firms are exploring for and developing oil in Azerbaijan. In 1998, the firm INPEX, together with JNOC, JAPEX, and Mitsubishi, created INPEX-North Caspian Oil, which joined with the consortium Offshore Kazakhstan International Operating Company (OKIOC), receiving 7.14 percent of its shares. This consortium is drilling and testing wells in the very promising Kashagan zone.⁷ Moreover, JNOC and Kazakhoil are also exploring for oil elsewhere in the Caspian and Aral Seas.

At the same time, the level of Japan's participation in projects in the Caspian pales in comparison with that of the United States and Western Europe or, for that matter, with its own past role in developing oil in the Middle East and Indonesia. Most Caspian oil travels west, not a convenient location from which to re-transport to Japan. JNOC and INPEX are interested in exporting Caspian oil through Iran, but this would not solve the problem of dependence on the Persian Gulf. Some suggest constructing a Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline and then supplying Japan by means of oil swaps. Others speak of constructing a Turkmenistan-Kazakhstan-China-Japan gas pipeline, the possibility of which Mitsubishi has long been considering, along with the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and Exxon. But these extremely long oil and gas lines are difficult to construct and do not yet have good prospects.

Thus the Caspian region is far from optimal for Japan as an alternative to Middle Eastern oil and much inferior to locations closer to Japan and accessible seas. Japan has for a long time developed and bought oil from Indonesia and China, and is now turning more attention to Sakhalin and Latin America, along with the Caspian. (Still, the oil of Sakhalin, which is important to Japan, is not a deciding factor in Japanese-Russian relations.)

Foreign analysts who contend that energy resources are a key factor in Japan's relations with Central Asia both exaggerate the significance of

⁷ Web-site of the firm INPEX [<http://www.inpex.co.jp/Japanese/kitakasupikai.htm>; http://www.inpex.co.jp/sub_exp.htm].

Caspian Sea oil and misperceive the energy situation within Japan.⁸ In fact in recent years, skepticism has grown in Japan over the possibility of solving its oil needs, when the country is without large-scale, competitive oil companies. JNOC was created in 1967 for developing oil overseas, but many of its projects have fallen short or turned out to be unprofitable. Dependence on the Middle East, which, up to the middle of the 1980s, gradually decreased thanks to the activities of JNOC and other organizations, has since 1987 again steadily increased. The government now plans to abolish JNOC, although important projects will be continued in other frameworks.

Freeing Japan from dependence on Middle East oil is only part of a larger problem. In the final analysis, the challenge arises less from its dependence on Middle East oil than its dependence on oil in general; therefore Japan has begun to develop alternative energy sources such as natural gas (imported predominantly from the Pacific Ocean region) and atomic energy.

If energy resources in the Caspian region were the prime object of Japanese interests, then it would give particular priority to Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan. But in reality, as will be seen, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan are no less important partners.

As for foreign trade, Kazakhstan is again Japan's most important partner in Central Asia; all large-scale Japanese commercial firms have representatives in Almaty. Since 1994, joint Japanese-Kazakh and Kazakh-Japanese economic cooperation committees have met almost yearly, drawing in many Japanese businessmen. In 2000, exports from Japan to Kazakhstan totaled 7,384 million yen (around \$68 million), and imports from Kazakhstan to Japan 9,859 million yen (around \$90 million). Yet in the end these numbers are insignificant, representing scarcely 0.02 per-

⁸ For example: Kent E. Calder, "Japan's Energy Angst and the Caspian Great Game," *NBR Analysis*, v. 12 no. 1, 2001 [<http://www.nbr.org/publications/analysis/vol12no1/essay.html>]. Calder writes that the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI; now METI, the Ministry of Economics, Trade and Industry), which stresses energy, plays a big role in Japanese-Central Asian relations along with the MFA. In reality, as can be seen in this chapter, affairs in Central Asia are constantly conducted by the MFA and the Ministry of Finance, and METI so far has had only sporadic involvement in these affairs. This serves as an indirect proof that economic considerations are not the fundamental base of Japanese policies in Central Asia.

cent of Japan's total foreign trade.⁹ Central Asia, with its small population (the population of the five countries together is less than the population of Thailand), is not particularly attractive as a market for Japanese products, although limited quantities of electrical goods, automobiles, and the like are exported to the region. Nor are Japanese firms interested in locating production facilities in Central Asia, because transportation from Japan is difficult and labor is neither cheaper nor more productive than in East Asia.

One of the reasons Japan's presence in Central Asia seems small, despite large-scale ODA, is the low level of direct investment. Investment in Central Asia is determined by specific risks, including economic instability and inconsistent economic policies. Japanese firms do not like risk, especially in their current difficult situation. Therefore, they view with strong reservations investment projects unsupported by Japanese ODA. This problem is particularly serious in Kazakhstan. While Kazakh unreliability may be no greater than that of its neighbors, instances when the Kazakh side has failed to fulfill commitments have been particularly damaging.

For example, the incident with the Karaganda Metallurgical Combine had especially severe consequences. In July 1994, the Japanese firms Nissho Iwai and Itochu signed contracts for the delivery of production equipment and the construction of a shop to clean coke gas. In April 1995, the Japanese Export-Import Bank extended a credit of 16 billion yen (around \$180 million) for the construction of the shop under the guarantee of the Kazakhstan government.¹⁰ At the same time, the Karaganda combine was in a deep crisis, and in May 1995 the rights to manage the governmental combine were transferred to the Austrian-Kazakh joint venture Voest-Alpine-Kazakhstan. The Japanese side, fearing a threat to its contract, sought but did not receive a satisfactory response from the Kazakh side. Instead in July 1995 Nazarbaev cancelled his previously scheduled meeting with the delegation of the Japanese-Kazakh Committee on Economic Cooperation.¹¹

⁹ Web-site of the Japanese ministry of finance [<http://www.mof.go.jp/trade-st/kunihin/k200012.htm>; <http://www.mof.go.jp/1c015f1.htm>].

¹⁰ *Delovaya Nedelya*, 7 April 1995, p. 1.

¹¹ *Panorama*, 10 June 1995, p. 9.

In July opposition among Kazakh politicians to Voest-Alpine-Kazakhstan led to the transfer of the rights to manage the combine to American and Israeli enterprises. But the crisis deepened, and in November the combine was placed under the joint management of the government and an international company called Ispat (later, Ispat became the sole owner of the combine). At this point Ispat and the Kazakhstan government simply ignored the contract with the Japanese. While the Japanese share some blame for failing to assess accurately the scale of economic disarray in the Karaganda combine, it is clear that the one-sided dissolution of a contract guaranteed by the Kazakh government constituted a gross violation of international law. Not only did the government ignore the damages inflicted on Japanese interests, it made no attempt even to apologize. On the contrary, then-First Deputy Prime Minister Nigmatzhan Isingarın, on a visit to Japan in December 1995, reproached Japanese businessmen for continually demanding government guarantees. “Earn your money yourselves, gentlemen,” he shouted at them, “Do your business!”¹² Thus, in a single ill-considered episode Kazakhstan acquired a reputation for not respecting contracts or promises—a fatal reputation for those who want to do business with Japan. To this day the volume of Japanese investment in Kazakhstan remains small. According to the statistics of the Kazakhstan Republic Agency for Statistics, in 2000 Japan occupied the fifteenth place among countries with direct investment in Kazakhstan, and its share of all foreign direct investment in Kazakhstan amounted to only 0.7 percent.¹³

MAJOR JAPANESE INTERESTS IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THEIR INCOMPATIBILITY WITH KAZAKHSTAN’S INTERESTS

If economics are not the major motivating force behind Japanese policy in Central Asia, then what is? First, Japan understands the indivisibility of

¹² *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, 13 December 1995, p. 1.

¹³ *Sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoe razvitie Respubliki Kazakhstan: yanvar’-mart 2001 goda* [The Socio-economic development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, January-March 2001], Almaty, 2001, pp. 61–62. Statistics on foreign investment in Kazakhstan from various sources contradict each other, and it is impossible to establish accurate figures. Some newspaper articles point to Japan’s large share of foreign investment in Kazakhstan.

international security, and, as a world power, recognizes its share of responsibility for contributing to stability in all regions of the world. In Japan's case, however, this sense of responsibility has a different meaning than for, say, the United States. Japan is not a "super-power," and its share of responsibility for global stability is limited. Japan dreams of becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC), and is trying to secure support for this aim from various countries, including the countries of Central Asia. But this is not Japan's most vital task since, on the one hand, becoming a permanent member of the UNSC in the near future is unrealistic, and on the other hand, the Japanese public is more interested in internal problems than in such questions.

Moreover, Japan is not a military power, and has no desire to play the role of "world policeman." It would rather concentrate on making its contribution in the economic sphere. In view of its modest economic stakes in Central Asia, Japan has basically no ulterior motives beyond wishing to help these countries restore their economies and make the transition to a market economy. (This, however, has not eliminated criticism that Japanese ODA to developing countries like those in Central Asia serves the interests of Japanese firms and local corrupt bureaucrats more than the interests of the common citizen.) Therefore, Japan is actively helping to improve infrastructure and inviting interns to participate in academic economic programs. But, because people in Central Asia naturally notice only those foreigners who direct large factories, hotels, and restaurants, Japan's efforts tend to go unnoticed. And regardless of the obvious necessity of improving the infrastructure, there are doubts concerning the efficacy of projects, since their plans are often formed without adequate preliminary study. Some believe the United States, with its technical aid programs, is more successful and efficient than Japan, with its expensive internship programs in Japan, which often are not tailored to the specific needs and interests of the Central Asian participants.

As for problems of stability in the military-political field, these are not as sharp in Kazakhstan as in several other countries in the region. In this regard, Japan has had significant involvement in Tajikistan, where the pressing task is to keep the peace after a civil war and to limit the effects from the Afghan war. However strange it may seem, the July 1998 murder of Akino Yutaka, a member of the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT), served as a strong impetus to develop Japanese-Tajik relations; for both the public and politicians he became

a hero who perished fighting for peace in a faraway land. The geopolitical importance of Tajikistan—earlier understood only by narrow circles of diplomats and academics—rose as a result, particularly within the government, and high-level exchange visits between Japan and Tajikistan occurred more frequently. In May 2001, the Tajik president, Emomali Rakhmonov, paid his first visit to Japan, and at the meeting of the Consultative Group of Donor Countries to Tajikistan, Japan promised to appropriate \$20 million. Japan had earlier planned to open its third Central Asian embassy in Bishkek, but instead opened one in Dushanbe in January 2002. (The ambassador post in Tajikistan will be shared by the ambassador to Uzbekistan).

However, Japan is again striving to make its contribution to stability in Tajikistan through economics, that is by improving infrastructure, increasing employment, and the like. While Japanese officials are well aware of the problems of terrorism and narcotics (narcotics from Afghanistan and Central Asia may even enter Japan), they are not yet ready to collaborate directly in such spheres.

Japan also seeks to guarantee stability in Central Asia by its long involvement in the peace process in Afghanistan. As early as 1988 Japan sent its diplomats on a UN Good-offices Mission to Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNGOMAP), and since then has actively supported the United Nations in mediating between the contending forces. It often expressed its willingness to host peace talks in Tokyo. Takahashi Hiroshi, a diplomat with considerable peace-keeping experience as a member of the UN Special Mission in Afghanistan (UNSMA) from 1996 to 1998 worked as the deputy chief of the UN Bureau for Peace-building Activities in Tajikistan (UNTOP) in 2000–01. In 2002, he returned to UNSMA as head of the political affairs division. After the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, Japan provided active assistance to the United States in the struggle against bin Laden and the Taliban, although it did not directly participate in military operations on Afghan territory. Tokyo also provided large material assistance to Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Tajikistan, and hosted the international conference on reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan in early 2002.

Furthermore, Japan, as a country that has experienced the tragedy of atomic weapons, is deeply involved in eliminating the effects of atomic testing at the Semipalatinsk testing site. Japanese specialists (especially from Nagasaki and Hiroshima) visit Semipalatinsk often and actively

cooperate with local medical staff.¹⁴ In September 1999, the Japanese government, along with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), held an international conference in Tokyo on medical and economic aid to the Semipalatinsk region.¹⁵ The Japanese are also working with Kazakhs in the search for ways to prevent the complete loss of the Aral Sea.

Second, Japan seeks to acquire “friends” in Asia. While Japan has no desire to repeat its pre-World War II dream of dominating a “Great Eastern Community,” it does want to be a leader within modern Asia, and thereby prove that Japan is not a U.S. appendage but an actor with its own independent policies. In the statements of Japanese officials one gets glimmerings of the notion that the existence of friendly Asian countries can compensate for both Japan’s lonely position among developed Western countries and its delicate position in East Asia, where neighbors often judge it by its colonial and military past. Consequently, Japan prefers bilateral relations with separate countries to multilateral (such as all-Asian, all-Eurasian, etc.) relations.

Hashimoto’s concept of “Eurasian Diplomacy” can also be understood from this point of view. The concept consists of two separate parts: first, efforts to improve relations with its neighbors, in the first instance, Russia; second, efforts to obtain friends in the new region of Asia, that is, in Central Asia. It is not an accident that the second part has subsequently been labeled “Silk-Road Diplomacy.” It is also worth noting that Japan is more interested in Central Asia than in the European or semi-European governments of the former USSR: Transcaucasia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and the Baltic States.

Here, however, is where the incompatibility of the “Asian” direction of Japan and the “Eurasian” direction of Kazakhstan arises. Kazakhstan

¹⁴ Satow Yukio, “Physical Conditions of the Environment and the Resident Population of the Semipalatinsk Area,” in Murakami Takashi and Tabata Shinichiro, eds., *Russian Regions: Economic Growth and Environment*, Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2000, pp. 391–400. [<http://srch.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/sympo/99summer/99summercontents.html>]; Web-site of the University of Nagasaki [http://www.med.Nagasakiu.ac.jp/renew/information/interna_heal_e/index.html].

¹⁵ For more details on the conference, see the website of Japanese MFA [<http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/Europe/Kazakhstan/semipala/index.html>].

will always try to maintain closer ties to CIS countries, in particular to Russia. (By “Eurasia,” Kazakhstan normally has in mind the CIS, rather than all of Eurasia.) It is easier for Japan to have friendly relations with such countries as Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, where officials often express sympathy for the Japanese as “Asian cousins.” Kyrgyzstan is a small country and some Japanese believe that it will be easy to make it “pro-Japanese”; the leadership of Kyrgyzstan, in its turn, frequently expresses sympathy for and gratitude to Japan (although some note that the Kyrgyz behave this way toward any country that may help them).

Uzbekistan conducts policies markedly independent of both Russia and the West, and some Japanese like to compare Uzbekistan with Japan immediately after the Meiji Restoration, when the Japanese were diligently trying to create a strong, independent government. They, in particular officials of the Ministry of Finance, hope that Uzbekistan will develop economically along the lines of the “Japanese model,” built around a close interaction between government and the private sector. They criticize the International Monetary Fund for imposing its model of a “pure” market economy on countries in economic transition, for not taking into consideration the specifics of each country and thus creating chaos.

The leaders of Uzbekistan are also critical of the IMF and often say they prefer the “Japanese model.” Moreover, they readily support Japanese positions on various international questions.¹⁶ After his visit to Central Asia in July 1997, Obuchi Keizo, the then-prime minister of Japan and later its foreign minister, enthusiastically reported “Mr. Karimov’s statement of his readiness to become the representative of Japanese interests in Central Asia, which created a big impression.”¹⁷ Of course, considering the complicated relations among Central Asian countries, Karimov’s statements of this kind should not be taken literally, but all the same they have a pleasant resonance among certain Japanese politicians and officials.

¹⁶ Sherzod Kudratkhodzhaev, *Yaponiya rassmatrivaet Uzbekistan kak klyuchevogo partnera v regione* [Japan Sees Uzbekistan as a Key Partner in the Region]: [<http://www.fergana.org/analytics/015.htm>].

¹⁷ *Roshia Chuo-Ajia Taiwa Misshon Hokoku: Yurashia Gaiko-eno Josho* [An Account of the Mission for Dialogue with Russia and Central Asia: Prelude to Eurasian Diplomacy], Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange, 1998, pp. 13, 92.

In contrast, Kazakhstan is not coy about asserting Kazakhstan's significance to every important country in the world, and that Japan has no special priority among them. Nor does it mean to make special efforts to secure Japan's support. In general, it seems that in Kazakhstan (and in lesser measure, in other Central Asian countries) people are too used to receiving aid offered by advanced countries. They sometimes complain that the assistance and investment from foreign countries are either insufficient or improper, as though these countries should compete to provide aid and investment to Central Asia. More than once have I heard Central Asians warn that "Japan is falling behind." Properly speaking, it is the countries and people of Central Asia who should compete to obtain new knowledge, technology, and investment, and should master the rules of behavior in the international community.¹⁸

It would, of course, not be true to say that Kazakhstan has no interest in Japan; a large number of young Kazakhs sincerely desire to learn more about the Japanese, and in 1998 the leadership of Kazakhstan appointed the well-known Japanese architect Kurokawa Kisho to be the general planner for the new capital of Astana, obviously hoping for financial aid from Japan. But Kurokawa's plan is evidently too original for some Kazakh leaders, and rumors are that they are keeping alternative plans in reserve. This, coupled with huge anticipated expenses, makes the Japanese government extremely cautious about the plan.

It is worth adding that Kazakhstan also has an "Asian" focus, but of a more multilateral character. In particular, in the UN General Assembly in October 1992, Nazarbaev proposed the idea of a Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia (CICA). Many countries, while outwardly supporting the idea, consider it too grandiose, ineffective and unrealistic. Japan at first showed little interest; while it still considers the proposal unclear, it eventually endorsed the idea and in recent years has been regularly attending meetings of CICA as an observer.

Japan recognizes the geopolitical importance of Central Asia, situated as it is between Russia, China, and the Middle East, but this recognition

¹⁸ Almost one hundred years ago, the outstanding Kazakh poet, politician, and enlightener Mir-Yakub Dulatov wrote that there is a competition occurring in the world for knowledge and technology, and Kazakhs must refuse the idea "Ripen, apple, and fall in my mouth," and that they should study the advanced cultures of the world in order to raise the independence of the Kazakhs. See: Mir-Yakub Dulatov, *Oyan, Kazak!* [Awake, Kazakh!] Ufa, 1910.

does not always translate into clear, concrete actions. In contrast to the United States, Japan does not try to contain the influence of Russia, China, and Iran in the region. On the one hand, this may seem only one more manifestation of the underdeveloped character of a security strategy in Japanese diplomacy. Thus, for example, Japan reacted less decisively than the United States even to events directly touching its own security, such as the illegal sale by Kazakhstan of 40 MiG-21 bombers to North Korea in 1999.

On the other hand, Japan has been consistent in its efforts to develop relations with all countries, as long as doing so with one does not damage relations with any other. Japanese diplomats believe that Japan can cooperate with Russia and China for the same goal—stability in Central Asia. It is true that in the very beginning of the establishment of relations with the countries of Central Asia, some in the Japanese government saw these relationships as a trump card in diplomacy with Russia. Thus, the Japanese began to give strong attention to Kyrgyzstan because Akaev clearly stated that Russia should return the Northern Territories to Japan. But Akaev's position did not influence Russia in the least, and the Japanese abandoned the idea.

For Central Asia's side, the explosive situation in the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region, the partially unresolved territorial problem with China, and the potential risk of massive Chinese immigration, are very serious problems. Japan, however, has not linked its China and Central Asian policies to ways of addressing these problems.

In contrast to the United States, the democratization of Central Asian countries is not a major goal of Japanese policy. Politicians and officials in Japan often say that democracy should not be imposed from the outside—that each country has the right to determine its own model of democratization. When the most important task is to restore the economy, democratization is better conducted slowly. One understands this approach when one takes into account that categorical American and European criticism of elections and the political actions of Central Asian leaders rarely stimulates democratization, but on the contrary simply strengthens anti-Western and anti-democratic tendencies.

Yet at the same time, those of this view turn a blind eye to the fact that in many Central Asian countries it is not “gradual democratization” that is taking place, but the entrenchment of authoritarian regimes. Some Japanese officials are proud that Japan was the first among developed

countries to extend a hand to Islam Karimov, who was at the time criticized by the United States and IMF for his undemocratic policies, only to be imitated by them a few years later. (The United States, it would appear, is not above sacrificing democracy to other goals.) Nor did the sharp turn toward authoritarianism in Kazakhstan in the mid-1990s affect relations between Japan and Kazakhstan.

Here is reflected, it seems, a hidden side to the history of Japan's own democratization. Although from the nineteenth century forward democratic forces existed in Japan, democratization was basically implemented by outside forces during the postwar American military occupation. Satisfactory as the results have been, for the most part, the fact that the political system was imposed from outside left a psychological wound among some Japanese, and the imposition of American and European values on other countries arouses their displeasure.

In another aspect, weak ties between the government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Japan itself are reflected in the actions Japanese officials take in Central Asia. They communicate predominantly with representatives of Central Asian governmental organizations, and their contacts with NGOs and the opposition occur only sporadically. Add to this that the activity of Japanese NGOs in Central Asia is minimal.

Nevertheless, it must not be said that Japanese are completely indifferent to democratization. Close ties to Kyrgyzstan, at least until recently, result in part from Akaev's image as the most democratic leader in the region. And the most despotic leader in Central Asia, the president of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, has so far never been invited to Japan.

SIGNS OF CHANGE

Recently, with the increasing awareness of its responsibilities in the international community, the Japanese government has intensified efforts to strengthen not only the framework for its bilateral relations within the region, but also that of multilateral institutions. In October 1999 and in April 2000, it helped the UN conduct conferences in Sapporo on the proposal to create a non-nuclear zone in Central Asia. In December 2000, it joined the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in convening a conference in Tokyo on common security in Central Asia.

To the extent that relations between Japan and Central Asia become

multifaceted and involve an increasing number of policymakers, the dependence on personal ties will decrease. The first generation of officials who served as eager “founders” of Japanese-Kyrgyz and Japanese-Uzbek relations (without necessarily understanding the significance and specific nature of each Central Asian country) are gradually retiring, while officials who know the region well and judge it soberly have begun to have more influence. Relations with Central Asian countries are becoming more balanced and, notwithstanding the absence of “patrons,” Kazakhstan now commands increasing attention in various Japanese circles beyond business and the bureaucracy. Popular Japanese interest in Kazakhstan is also increasing. The number of Japanese who have lived in Kazakhstan for an extended period of time is growing: 88 Japanese registered at the Japanese Embassy in 1995, and 168 in 1999 (that year 129 Japanese citizens lived in Uzbekistan).¹⁹ Japan has also begun to produce good academic specialists on Kazakhstan; indeed, more for it than any other country in Central Asia.

In Uzbekistan, the lack of currency convertibility hinders business, and in Kyrgyzstan, the effects linger from the Batken incident in 1999, when members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan kidnapped four Japanese geologists. Moreover, Japanese investors have looked at most opportunities in these countries and developed those attractive to them. Kazakhstan, on the other hand, offers new possibilities, particularly in the oil industry. Slowly the effects are fading, of the 1994 Karaganda Combine incident described earlier. A growing number of Japanese firms are willing to invest in Kazakhstan without ODA or other forms of governmental support.

Thus, Japanese business activity in Central Asia, especially in Kazakhstan, seems likely to grow. Still, there are problems. In recent years, the Kazakhstan government has often blamed foreign investors for failing to meet labor safety and environmental standards. It has considered legislation curtailing their benefits and giving the government the right to annul contracts that it considers disadvantageous.²⁰ In all likelihood,

¹⁹ Web-site of the Japanese Embassy in RK [<http://www.jpemb.kz/en/relation/resident/index.html>].

²⁰ See Michael Lelyveld, “Kazakhstan: Law Changes Spark Investor Concern,” *RFE/RL Weekday Magazine*, 12 June 2001 [<http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/2001/06/12062001111830.asp>], and other analytical articles at RFE/RL.

Kazakhstan is now beginning to shift from actively attempting to attract foreign investment to cultivating Kazakh investors. But a drastic shift in investment policies will drive away those investors whose cooperation is needed by Kazakh investors themselves. And it will undermine the international community's trust in Kazakhstan, already threatened by rumors that these changes are simply meant to serve the financial interests of the president's family and entourage.

In Japan's case, Kazakhstan annulled the agreement on dual taxation in December 1995; thus not only investors but also the Japanese government, even when giving aid, can avoid taxation only through exceptions granting by the Kazakh government on a case-by-case basis. Nor is everything being done to strengthen relations that might be done, on the Kazakh side. The Kazakh embassy in Japan is much less active than the Japanese embassy in Kazakhstan; in Kazakh governmental circles, very few people know Japan well. Unless the Kazakhs make more of an effort in these areas, change on the Japanese side is not likely to bear fruit.

CONCLUSION: THE OUTLOOK FOR DIPLOMACY WITHOUT A GRAND STRATEGY

The concept of strategy presupposes the existence of prevailing interests. In Central Asia, Japan does not have national interests in the classic sense, such as vitally important economic interests or the need to maintain security in regions of close proximity. Neither is Japan a superpower, constantly competing with other powers, seeking to expand its sphere of influence, or actively taking measures to promote security in various regions around the world. With this in mind, the criteria for analyzing and judging Japanese policy need to be adjusted.

The starting premise is that Japan has only limited and indirect interests in Central Asia. Moreover, it must be recognized that the Japanese do not have unified interests in the region. Business and governmental circles, although closely interdependent in many concrete projects, act principally by a different logic. For businessmen, it is important to have the greatest returns with the smallest risk. Therefore, if the expected returns diminish or the risks in a given country increase, they are likely to leave for other countries in Central Asia or in other regions of the world. The government's main goal is Japan's prestige in the world community, which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs pursues by providing economic

assistance and contributions to regional stability, and the Ministry of Finance by propagating the “Japanese model” of economics. Thus, politicians and officials can focus attention on such countries as Kyrgyzstan, where Japan has almost no economic interests, and Tajikistan, which until recently was a dangerous place for foreigners. Judged by these criteria, Japan’s activities in the region are entirely logical and consistent, even if not within a grand strategy.

One more trait of Japanese diplomacy, in contrast to “strategic” diplomacy, emerges from the form of interaction it has with other countries. Countries with strategic diplomacy, in particular the United States, first construct a strategy, and then, having seen the reaction of other countries, introduce slight corrections. The Japanese, however, first listen to those with whom they are planning to deal, and then decide on the kind of relations to build. Precisely for this reason, Kyrgyzstan’s and Uzbekistan’s friendly attitude and Kazakhstan’s indifferent attitude toward Japan strongly influenced Japan’s behavior in the first stage. It is very important to note that regardless of the outward similarity of U.S. and Japanese opinion on many international questions, the method of forming and conducting Japanese diplomacy is very different from that of the United States. The logic of Japanese diplomacy is difficult to understand within the framework of strategic diplomacy, but quite comprehensible when judged by another yardstick.

There remains, however, a last question: How are the results of Japanese diplomacy in Central Asia to be evaluated? Do they correspond with Tokyo’s stated goals, especially that of raising its prestige in the world community by contributing to Central Asian development and stability? While it is still too early to draw firm conclusions, so far the results are rather modest. ODA, which Japan grants in large sums, is not always gratefully received. A large part of ODA is credit that the receiving country must later pay back. And as earlier noted, critics often see ODA projects as poorly conceived and ineffective. Nor is the general concept of economic, technological, and humanitarian aid entirely clear within Japan; aid programs do not mobilize many people, either on the Japanese side or among the local population; and their results are not widely publicized. Therefore, Japanese efforts in these fields are much less known than those of USAID or the European Union’s TACIS program.

It might also be asked whether economic means are adequate for contributing to stability in Central Asia. Those Japanese who call for “grad-

ual democratization” do not deny that in the final analysis democratic countries are more stable than authoritarian ones, but they do not present their vision of how to accomplish this “gradual democratization.” And although Japan cannot directly intervene in the security problems of Central Asia, it can gather more information, make more thorough analyses and give needed advice to local governments. For example, some experts on the region stress that one reason for the rise of Uzbek and Uighur Islamic terrorists is the state’s repression of nonviolent opposition and religious activists. They would have the world community attempt to convince the leaders of these countries to soften their approach, but the Japanese government ignores their advice and appeals.

These shortcomings, nevertheless, can be corrected without introducing an American- or Russian-style “strategy.” Thus, in the end, is a strategy necessary? The collision of various countries’ strategies leads more often to instability than to stability. Better that we not repeat the “Great Game.” And, even if external powers conscientiously try to maintain security in the region, intervention in the internal affairs of these states may provoke a hostile reaction by the local leadership and population. Actions taken without an understanding of specific local characteristics often lead to unpredictable consequences. International relations should develop by promoting mutual understanding. Harsh demands should not be made of someone absent proper mutual understanding. In this sense, the Japanese government is not wrong in principle when it strives to develop multifaceted ties with Central Asian states and to cooperate in concrete spheres where Japanese capacities and their needs coincide, without paying undue regard to grandiose strategy.

On the other hand, however, some may argue that a world where countries have no strategy slides into chaos. It is possible that Japan can get along without a strategy because the United States supplies strategy on a world scale. Most likely, however, “strategic” and “non-strategic” countries complement each other: the former create overall, dynamic world policies, and the latter soften the confrontations between world powers.

Currently, Japanese diplomacy and policy stand at a crossroads. People are preoccupied with prospective reforms of the political, administrative, economic, and academic systems, but it is not clear in which direction the reforms will go. Diplomats have become the object of especially strong attention. The scandal tied to the appropriation by MFA employees of

government funds from the “secret fund,” and also the conflict between the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Tanaka Makiko, parliament member Suzuki Muneo, and officials at the MFA, have seriously undermined the authority of the MFA. Politicians who do not understand diplomacy are intervening in matters of diplomacy and creating disorder. In such a situation, it is hard to predict the future of Japanese policy in Central Asia. But there are people who are inconspicuously but constantly making efforts for the development of relations between Japan and Central Asia, and it is entirely possible that eventually Japanese diplomacy, even without a strategy, will bear more substantial fruit.