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**Engage Directly
With Taliban In
Afghanistan,
Japan Tells G-7
Nations**



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Engage Directly With Taliban In Afghanistan, Japan Tells G-7 Nations

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Addressing top diplomats of G-7 nations on Monday, Japan's foreign minister called for direct engagement with the interim Taliban administration in Afghanistan. Drawing from Japan's experience of the situation on the ground, a statement by Japan's Foreign Ministry said Yoshimasa Hayashi "emphasized the need to engage persistently and directly with the Taliban."

Japan's top diplomat was discussing Afghanistan and Central Asia for around an hour with his colleagues from the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and the US, plus the EU. Hayashi called for continuing assistance to the people of Afghanistan in cooperation with the international community.

Comments

Background

Japan has been an active contributor in the development of Afghanistan, for decades.[1] Scholars have termed their contribution as multifaceted[2], which not only includes assisting in reconstruction activities along with local partnered agencies, using diplomatic platforms to gain global attention to the issues in Afghanistan, supporting the Afghan refugees, fostering economic growth through development initiatives, fostering peace-centric initiatives or assisting regional institutions to preserve Afghanistan's cultural heritage.[3] Between 2001 to 2022, Japan contributed over \$6.9 billion in official development assistance, (becoming a leading donor-nation to Afghanistan). [4]. Engaging actively under the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Japan's aid was over USD 40 million (since 2002) with efforts focussed on rehabilitating former soldiers and investing in a young a police through education initiatives.

[1] ASHIZAWA, KUNIKO. 2014. "JAPAN'S APPROACH TO PEACEBUILDING IN AFGHANISTAN." *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 9 (3): 1–16. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48603496>.

[2] Hein, Patrick. 2011. "In the Shadow of Pacifism: Foreign Policy Choices of Germany and Japan in Afghanistan." *East Asia* 28 (2): 135–55. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-011-9140-5>.

[3] Monten, Jonathan. 2014. "Intervention and State-Building: Comparative Lessons from Japan, Iraq, and Afghanistan." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 656 (1): 173–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716214546989>.

[4] Nagao, Satoru. 2022. "Japan's Stakes in the Afghanistan Crisis." ORF, February 8, 2022. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/japans-stakes-in-the-afghanistan-crisis/>.

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Its relentless contribution coupled by Minister Hayashi emphasizing the need to engage persistently and directly with the Taliban (addressing G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Karuizawa, Nagano) while continuing to provide assistance to the people of Afghanistan in cooperation with the international community, point towards Japan's renewed commitment towards peace and security in Afghanistan.

This further raises the question especially after Minister Hayashi address (Japan will make persistent effort in directly engaging with the Taliban to change their course, including reversing various restrictions on the rights of women and girls, and ensuring political inclusiveness) during the adoption of Resolution 2678 of the United Nations Security Council (which renews the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for one year)[5]. To analyse Tokyo's expression on the need to interact with the new Taliban regime, it is important to understand key factors that can potentially drive its Afghanistan policy.

Drivers of Japanese foreign policy in Afghanistan

Tokyo's desire to re-engage with Taliban can be outlined in three key objectives:[6]

- a) Re-strengthening US-Japan alliance,
- b) Demonstrating Japan as a major contributor towards global peace & security
- c) Establishing ties with a new Afghanistan.

That said, Japan's foreign policy on Afghanistan (between 2001 to 2022) was greatly influenced by the US, which cannot be underestimated even in Tokyo's recent call for direct engagement with Taliban.[7] This is true, as the US-Japan alliance has been the foundation of Japan's security policy post-second world war. There is no doubt on Washington's influence even during Tokyo's recent stance especially when Japanese contribution in humanitarian reconstruction initiatives in Afghanistan occurred primarily under the umbrella of US-Japan military alliance.[8]

[5] Ku, Jae H, Drew Thompson, and Daniel Wertz. 2011. "The U.S.-Japan Alliance and Afghanistan." *Northeast Asia in Afghanistan: Whose Silk Road?* US-Korea Institute at SAIS. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11156.8>.

[6] Interaction with scholar(s) affiliated with the University of Tsukuba, New York University & Georgetown University

[7] Lee, Manhee. 2014. "Japan's Rethinking of Global Economic Security in Its Relations with the U.S." *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 28 (2): 25-59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43233876>.

[8] Ku, Jae H, Drew Thompson, and Daniel Wertz. 2011. "The U.S.-Japan Alliance and Afghanistan." *Northeast Asia in Afghanistan: Whose Silk Road?* US-Korea Institute at SAIS. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11156.8>.

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Taliban: A potential partner?

A month after Washington's first one-on-one meeting with the Taliban since their return, the Japanese Ambassador made a four-day visit to Afghanistan in November 2021.[9] Ambassador Okada interacted with senior Taliban leadership including the Deputy Chairman of the Interim Government Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, and spoke in great length on Japan's intent on re-initiating humanitarian assistance through international organizations and emphasised on: [10]

- a) Respecting human rights values,
- b) Political inclusivity and respect to all sections of the society
- c) Denying terrorist factions/groups safe havens in Afghanistan

According to one account, during the meeting the Taliban leadership called for greater cooperation with Japan with a senior Taliban leader requesting Japanese delegation to maintain constant presence in Kabul.[11] This meeting resulted in Tokyo officially announcing humanitarian assistance package of \$109 million to address the crisis in Afghanistan and affected regional economies.[12]

Reviving Ties: Cultural connect or Silk Route?

Notwithstanding with global security concerns, Tokyo's enthusiasm also resonates its interest to preserve the heritage of the Silk Road.[13] This is an achievable objective as Japan is a key responsible actor in the context of securing cultural heritage and actively contributes (regularly promotes) to the mandate of UNESCO.[14] Japan has successfully conducted numerous projects restoring objects in and around the Silk Road in Central Asia, and contributed majorly in restoring the Buddhist statues in Bamiyan (during the previous regime) with an intent to strengthen its image as responsible actor in international cooperation while preserving heritage sites significant with Buddhism.[15]

[9] Kyodo News Agency. 2021. "Taliban Ask Japan Envoy to Reopen Embassy in Afghanistan." The Japan Times, November 25, 2021. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/11/25/national/afghan-ambassador/>

[10] Middle East Monitor. 2021. "Japan Mulls Reopening of Embassy in Kabul during 'working-Level' Discussions with Taliban." Middle East Monitor, November 25, 2021. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20211125-japan-mulls-reopening-of-embassy-in-kabul-during-working-level-discussions-with-taliban/>.

[11] Author's interaction with a Kabul based scholar

[12] Ariana News. 2021. "Japan Pledges \$109 Million to Afghanistan and Its Neighbors to 'address Crisis.'" Ariana News. 2021. <https://www.ariananews.af/japan-pledges-109-million-to-afghanistan-and-its-neighbors-to-address-crisis/>

[13] Interaction with a scholar affiliated with the Tokyo International University

[14] Akagawa, Natsuko. 2016. "Japan and the Rise of Heritage in Cultural Diplomacy: Where Are We Heading?" Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism 13 (1): 125-39. <https://doi.org/10.5749/futuante.13.1.0125>.

[15] UNESCO. 2020. "UNESCO and Japan Support Afghanistan's Efforts towards Removing the Bamiyan Valley from the List of World Heritage in Danger." Press Release. 2020. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2088>.

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Source: La Prensa Latina

This engagement was largely aimed to remind Japan's significance (historical connect) in the context of Silk Road which also plays for a major regional strategy in Eurasia.[16] Japan sharing its historical ties with many ethnic groups in Afghanistan, coupled by its commitment to support Afghanistan through humanitarian assistance and reconstruction programs directly impacting the lives of local Afghans, gives necessary weight if Tokyo decides to engage.

Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (PQI) in Asia: Tokyo's response to Chinese infrastructure financing in Afghanistan?

As stated in the aforementioned arguments, Japan will play an instrumental role in redefining Afghanistan's infrastructure, if it decides to engage with Taliban. Taking note of Chinese investment opportunities (short to medium term), Japan's PQI has the potential to counter-balance Chinese infrastructure investment in the region.[17] With Japan's footprint in road connectivity (trunk & local roads), community-oriented infrastructures, road repair & maintenance capacity and rapid transport systems, PQI is comprehensive even beyond Official Development Assistance, as it reinforces the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) to provide support for high-risk infrastructure projects.[18] Its extensive collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the context of increased lending capacity for projects undertaken by local-regional private entities, inviting international aid institutions to grant financial assistance in local infrastructure projects. The PQI not only strengthens India-Japan relationship bilaterally (reinforcing Make in India initiative for domestic infrastructure projects), it also enables greater partnership for infrastructure development in Afghanistan while augmenting connectivity between Afghanistan, India and other countries in the region.

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[16] SÝKORA, Jan. 2023. "Review of Japan on the Silk Road: Encounters and Perspectives of Politics and Culture in Eurasia." Edited by Selçuk Esenbel. *Japan Review* 36 (May): 193–95. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48687842>.

[17] Wilson, Jeffrey. 2020. "Infrastructure Choices and the Future of the Indo-Pacific." *Security Challenges* 16 (3): 64–68. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26924342>.

[18] Pascha, Werner. 2020. "The Quest for Infrastructure Development from a 'Market Creation' Perspective: China's 'Belt and Road', Japan's 'Quality Infrastructure' and the EU's 'Connecting Europe and Asia.'" *International Economics and Economic Policy* 17 (3): 687–704. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10368-020-00468-0>.