Background Documents Distributed to the members of the Joint Palestinian-Japanese Working Group in preparation for the January 26 Online Workshop

Japan in the Middle East, 2017-2021

The Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process and Palestinian-Japanese Relations (excerpts from Japan’s MOFA Bluebook)

January 2022

PCPSR
Japan in the Middle East, 2017-2021
The Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process
Palestinian-Japanese Relation

Excerpts from the Diplomatic Bluebooks issued by Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The following excerpts are taken from the Bluebooks issued during the past five years, between 2017-21. They describe an overview of the international situations and Japan’s diplomatic activities.
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**Background Reports prepared for the first workshop**

Mohammad Daraghmeh, *Japan As Seen by the Palestinian Media: How the Palestinian Press and Social Media View Japanese Culture, Literature, Technology, Economy, and Palestinian-Japanese Relations*

Dr. Abdel Nasser Makky, *Strengthening Japan’s “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” Initiative: Japan and the Jordan Valley*

PCPSR, *Japan in the Middle East, 2017-2021: The Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process and Palestinian-Japanese Relations (excerpts from Japan’s MOFA Bluebook)*


Omar Sha’ban, *Japan’s Developmental Role in the Gaza Strip: The Constraints of the “Split” and the Promising Potential in Partnering with Civil Society and the Productive Sector*


**Background Report prepared for the Second workshop**

Khalil Shikaki, *Japan and Palestine: Timeline of Main Developments and Turning Points in the last 50 years*

**Reports on workshop’s proceedings**


**Other Publications**

*The Future of the Middle East Peace Process: Policy Recommendations produced by the Middle East Study Group*, Headed by Dr. Ryoji Tateyama, Professor Emeritus, National Defense Academy of Japan, Organized by The Japanese Institute of International Affairs

*Government of Japan, Japan’s assistance to the Palestinians*

*Government of Japan, JAIP: Jericho Agro-Industrial Park*
5. Middle East Peace Process

(1) Developments in Middle East Peace Process

The U.S. mediation led to direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine from July 2013 to April 2014. However, they faltered in the face of a wide gap in the positions of the two sides, and there have been no signs of resumption since then.

The security situation has been worsening in Israel and at the West Bank since around mid-2015 with frequent collisions between Israelis and Palestinians. While the situation appeared to subside from the beginning of 2016, the mutual distrust is strong and there is no sense of moving towards peace. In addition, Israel continues its settlement policy and the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip has been deteriorating as well.

The international community has continued to urge both Israel and Palestine to resume the negotiations at an early date to improve such situation. In particular, France called for an international conference in an attempt to break through the status quo. To discuss all sorts of means to resume negotiations and reaffirm the two-state solution, a ministerial-level meeting was held in June for major countries other than Israel and Palestine and attended by Japanese Special Envoy for the Middle East Peace.

On December 23, the UN Security Council adopted UN Security Council Resolution 2334 demanding that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities, with 14 countries, including Japan, voting for the resolution and the one country (the U.S.) abstaining.

This was followed by a speech that included a plan for the basis of future peace negotiations given by U.S. Secretary of State Kerry on December 28. In addition, France convened a Conference for Middle East Peace in Paris on January 15, 2017, attended by Japan's State Minister for Foreign Affairs Sonoura.

(2) The Japanese Government’s Efforts

In cooperation with the international community, Japan has approached Israel and Palestine to achieve a “two-state solution.” Political dialogues were conducted at all levels involving the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and special envoy of the Government of Japan for the Middle East peace. Japan is also making an effort to contribute to confidence-building between Israel and Palestine by inviting relevant people from both sides to Japan.

In January 2015, Prime Minister Abe met with Prime Minister Netanyahu in Israel and President Abbas in Palestine, directly urging both leaders to advance the process for a solution to the Middle East issue. President Abbas visited Japan in February 2016, and
the Japan side encouraged him to take a flexible approach and resume the negotiations at an early date.

Japan's support for Palestine since 1993 amounts to 1.7 billion US dollars, covering humanitarian support, job creation, healthcare, agriculture, and a variety of fields. The “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative is Japan's unique effort to address Palestine's economic self-sustainability specifically in cooperation with Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. Palestinian private-sector companies have started operations at the currently being developed Jericho Agro-Industrial Park, a flagship project of this initiative, and it is expected that more companies will participate and create new employment opportunities. A ministerial meeting of the four parties in this initiative (Japan, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan) was convened in September, chaired by State Minister for Foreign Affairs Sonoura. Participants agreed that they would cooperate to develop the initiative.

The Government of Japan engages in tripartite cooperation with Asian nations under the framework of the “Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD)” aiming to mobilize Asian countries for practical assistance to Palestine.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Sonoura, attending the 5th Ministerial Meeting of the Four-Party Consultative Unit for the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” (September 7, 2016, Jericho, Palestine).
A Developments in the Middle East Peace Process

The Middle East Peace Process has stagnated since negotiations between Israel and Palestine faltered in April 2014. Israel is continuing with its settlement policy, mutual mistrust is firmly entrenched, and a return to talks has not been achieved. Humanitarian situations in the Gaza Strip also continue to be severe.

With the inauguration of the Trump administration in the U.S. in 2017, and indications that the administration would take a proactive stance toward resolving the issue of peace in the Middle East, hope has grown in the international community that it will be possible to break the deadlock. High-level U.S. officials have made repeated visits to Israel and Palestine to listen to the opinions of both sides.

On the other hand, President Trump announced, on December 6 (U.S. Eastern Time), his intention to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Although it was made clear that President Trump's announcement did not forejudge the final status of Jerusalem, many Arabic/Islamic countries expressed their opposition to the announcement as they saw it as being a violation of the established principles of the international community regarding its status. Demonstrations against the announcement were held in some areas, and in Palestine a number of deaths occurred as a result of conflict with Israel's security authorities.

In response, an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council was held and a resolution calling on all countries to refrain from establishing diplomatic missions in Jerusalem and stating that measures contravening past Security Council resolutions concerning Jerusalem would not be accepted was vetoed by the U.S. The same resolution was subsequently put to a vote at the UN General Assembly and this was passed by a majority vote, including a vote from Japan.

B The Government of Japan's Efforts

Japan has been working on political and economic fronts in coordination with the international community toward the achievement of a “two-state solution” that would enable Israelis and Palestinians to coexist peacefully. Political dialogue has been conducted at all levels involving the Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Special Envoy of the Government of Japan for the Middle East Peace. Japan is
contributing toward the creation of an environment that will be essential for achieving peace, and working to build trust between Israelis and Palestinians by inviting officials and youths from both sides to Japan, among others.

In January 2015, Prime Minister Abe met with Prime Minister Netanyahu in Israel and President Abbas in Palestine. When President Abbas visited Japan in February 2016, Prime Minister Abe urged him to take a flexible approach toward the resumption of direct negotiations.

In December 2017, Foreign Minister Kono visited Israel and Palestine to hold talks with Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas, and told them the importance of constructive responses from both parties.

Japan's support for Palestine since 1993 amounts to 1.86 billion US dollars, covering humanitarian support, job creation, healthcare, agriculture, and a variety of other fields. The “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative is Japan's unique effort to enable Palestine to achieve economic self-sustainability in cooperation with Israel, Palestine and Jordan. Several companies have commenced operations at the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park (JAIP), a flagship project of this initiative, and it is expected that more companies will operate and create new employment opportunities. In December 2017, Foreign Minister Kono visited JAIP to attend an unveiling ceremony commemorating the start of Phase II. At the ceremony, he announced that greater focus will be placed on cooperation in the ICT field and improvements of distribution, in order to further enhance the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity initiative.”

Japan engages in tripartite cooperation with Asian countries under the Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD) framework, which was launched by Japan with the aim of encouraging Asian countries to provide support.
Chapter 2
Japan's Foreign Policy that Takes a Panoramic Perspective of the World Map

Section 6 The Middle East and North Africa

1 Overview

The Middle East and North Africa are situated in a geopolitically important location at the intersection of Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and South Asia. This region contains major international maritime routes for international commerce and is also an important supplier of energy resources, including crude oil and natural gas, to the rest of the world. On the other hand, the region faces a number of destabilizing issues such as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other violent extremist groups, the vast number of refugees that are flowing into nearby regions, the prolonged crisis in Syria, the Middle East Peace Process, the tensions between countries in the region, and domestic conditions in Afghanistan, Yemen, and Libya. Achieving peace and stability in this region is of great importance for the world as a whole, including Japan, and Japan is working with the international community to resolve these issues.

Japan relies on the Middle East for more than 80% of its crude oil imports and has developed ties with countries in the Middle East and the North Africa region (hereinafter, “countries in the Middle East”) that have centered on the resources and energy sectors. Today, however, beyond these relationships, Japan works to build more multilayered ones including wide-ranging economic cooperation, politics and security, and culture and people-to-people exchanges. Specifically, Prime Minister Abe has visited this region seven times since the inauguration of the second Abe administration in December 2012. Foreign Minister Kono has also visited the region eight times since taking his current position in August 2017. High-level visits, meetings, and talks are also held actively.

In particular, Foreign Minister Kono has given strong commitment to this region as one of six pillars of Japan’s foreign policy. The “Kono Four Principles” that he set forth at the first Japan-Arab Political Dialogue held in Egypt in September 2017 forms the basic principles of his Middle East policy. The four principles are: (1) intellectual and human contribution, (2) investment in people, (3) enduring efforts, and (4) enhancing political efforts. Based on the “Kono Four Principles,” Japan provides support for the Middle East Peace Process and dialogues to resolve issues in Syria and other countries. As a part of its efforts to support Palestine, Japan is also advancing the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative and the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD) (See Special Feature “Japan’s Support for Palestine (JAIP, CEAPAD)” ). In April 2018, the Senior Officials Meeting on Supporting Job Creation
and Vocational Training to Facilitate Weapons Reduction for Iraqi Society was held with an aim of stabilizing Iraq after the withdrawal of ISIL (post-ISIL). At the IISS Manama Dialogue held in October, which Foreign Minister Kono attended for the second consecutive year, he emphasized that Japan will make use of its experiences to support reform efforts by the Middle East countries through human resource development and other means. Japan will make full use of its friendly relations with the Middle East countries and its alliance with the U.S. to continue implementing its own initiatives toward realizing peace and stability in the Middle East.

Although the area controlled by ISIL has decreased significantly in size, the Syrian crisis remains unresolved. Since the beginning of the crisis in Syria, Japan has provided support worth more than 2.5 billion US dollars in total to Syria and its neighboring countries, including support to Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, which have been affected by an influx of Syrian refugees. Japan will continue to provide humanitarian support for all Syrians who need it, while supporting the Syrian political process led by the United Nations.

(5) Israel

Israel excels in the development of advanced technology and innovation and holds importance for the Japanese economy. It also plays an important role in the stability of the Middle East region. In recent years, Israel has been expanding its relationship with Asia, including Japan, as a part of its efforts to diversify its diplomacy. As a result, the cooperative relations between Japan and Israel has been strengthened exponentially, particularly in the economic front. Compared to 2013, the number of Japanese businesses in Israel has increased threefold, while the amount of investment has increased by 120 times. The Embassy of Japan in Israel opened the Japan Innovation Center in June under its auspices, and is engaged in providing active support for developing relationships between Japanese and Israeli corporations.

On May 2, Prime Minister Abe visited Israel for the first time in three years. During the visit, he held a meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu, welcomed the development of economic relations with Israel in recent years, and affirmed Japan's intention to advance cooperation including in the areas of politics and security. Thereafter, the two countries held their first Politico-Military (PM) Dialogue in October and the Fourth Dialogue on Cyber Issues as well as Bilateral Consultation on Disarmament and Non-proliferation Issues in November. From 2017 to 2018 alone, eight ministers from Israel visited Japan, and active intergovernmental dialogues are taking place between the two countries in a wide range of areas.
(6) Palestine

Based on the Oslo Accords of 1993 and other agreements, the Palestinian National Authority (PA) began self-government rule in the West Bank and Gaza from 1995. Prime Minister Abbas assumed office as President after the presidential elections held in January 2005. After that, however, relations between the Fatah led by President Abbas and Hamas deteriorated, and Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip by military force. Through Egypt's mediation efforts, Fatah and Hamas reached an agreement in-principle in October 2017 to transfer power in the Gaza Strip to the PA. However, the agreement has not been implemented and the division remains, with the West Bank still held by Fatah and the Gaza Strip remaining effectively under Hamas control.

On May 1, 2018, Prime Minister Abe visited Palestine for the first time in three years and met with President Abbas. During the meeting, they exchanged views on a wide range of topics related to the Middle East Peace Process, and Prime Minister Abe expressed that Japan will continue to support Palestine in this time of difficulty. The next day, Prime Minister Abe visited the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park (JAIP), the flagship project of the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative led by Japan, and inspected the steady progress of Japan's support efforts.
Japan has been implementing unique initiatives concerning peace and stability in the Middle East with the aim of fostering trust among the parties involved, including the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative and the Conference on the Cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD). The Corridor for Peace and Prosperity is a plan developed in 2006 that seeks to promote economic autonomy for Palestine with regional cooperation by Japan, Palestine, Israel, and Jordan as a longer-term initiative. CEAPAD is a framework for regional discussions launched by Japan in February 2013 to support Palestine’s nation building by mobilizing East Asia’s knowledge and experience with economic advancement.

Below are introductions to Jericho Agro-Industrial Park (JAIP), a flagship project of the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative, and CEAPAD.

1. JAIP

JAIP is a project to build an agro-industrial park as an operational base for Palestinian small and medium enterprises in the suburbs of Jericho. As of December 2018, 13 Palestinian companies are operating at the park (including companies producing supplements made from olive leaf extract, paper towels, soaps, beverages, and other daily goods) and have created about 200 jobs. Another 19 companies have tenancy contracts.

Prime Minister Abe visited JAIP in May 2018. Prior to that, Foreign Minister Kono visited JAIP in December 2017 to attend an opening ceremony of Phase 2 and announced plans to expand the scope of JAIP to include the ICT sector, as well as the facilitation of logistics, as a grade-up strategy of the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative. The
project is currently under Phase 2 of the three planned phases. Palestine held an ICT business competition in October 2018 and Japan invited five top competition participants to Japan in December.

2. CEAPAD

A ministerial meeting, which was chaired by Foreign Minister Kono and attended by ASEAN countries, the Republic of Korea, and others, took place in Thailand in June 2018. In the meeting, the ministers confirmed areas for future assistance for Palestine and reconfirmed the importance of the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Foreign Minister Kono introduced JAIP products at the meeting.

Additionally, Japan arranged a tour of Palestine with ambassadors from CEAPAD member countries (Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, etc.) and visited JAIP and UNWRA refugee camps in October 2018. Participating countries commented that it was "a very informative visit" and expressed gratitude for Japan's initiative, particularly since some participating countries do not have diplomatic relations with Israel.

Foreign Minister Kono introducing JAIP products at the CEAPAD ministerial meeting (June 27, Bangkok, Thailand)
Palestinian Prime Minister Hamdallah, ministers, and a group of ambassadors and others of countries participating in the tour (October 11, Jericho, Palestine)

(7) Middle East Peace Process

A Developments in the Middle East Peace Process

The Middle East Peace Process has stagnated since negotiations between Israel and Palestine faltered in April 2014. Israel is continuing with its settlement policy, mutual mistrust is firmly entrenched, and a return to talks has not been achieved. Humanitarian situations in the Gaza Strip also continue to be severe.

The U.S. Trump administration announced in December 2017 its position recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moved the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem on May 14, 2018. In response, demonstrations were held by protestors in Palestine, and in the Gaza Strip, more than 50 people died while many were injured as a result of violent clashes with Palestinians and Israeli security forces. After that, tensions have erupted intermittently, such as clashes in the Gaza Strip, the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip, and air strikes by Israeli forces on Hamas bases.

B The Government of Japan's Efforts

Japan has been working on political and economic fronts in coordination with the international community toward the achievement of a “two-state solution” that would enable Israelis and Palestine to coexist in peace.

Political dialogue has been conducted at all levels involving the Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Special Envoy of the Government of Japan for the Middle East Peace, such as the visit by Prime Minister Abe to Israel and Palestine in May 2018. Furthermore, through Japan’s unique initiative, the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” (See Japan's Assistance for Palestine (JAIP, CEAPAD),” invitational programs from Israel and Palestine to Japan, and other means, Japan is working for confidence building
between the parties concerned and has contributed to creating an environment that is vital toward the realization of peace. In particular, with regard to the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative, Foreign Minister Kono held a meeting of the Four-Party Consultative Unit with Israel, Palestine, and Jordan in April 2018 in Jordan. Japan also took the lead in the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD), which aims to harness the experience and resources of Asian countries to support Palestine, and a CEAPAD ministerial meeting was held in Bangkok, Thailand, in June.
A Developments in the Middle East Peace Process

The Middle East Peace Process has stagnated since negotiations between Israel and Palestine faltered in April 2014. Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank continue, but due to the occurrence of periodic rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip, mutual mistrust has deepened and a return to talks has not been achieved.

Additionally, the U.S. Trump administration announced in December 2017 its position recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moved the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in May, 2018. The Trump administration in August also decided to suspend all support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). The Trump administration acknowledged Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights in March 2019, and in November Secretary of State Pompeo remarked that the establishment of Israeli settlements was not inconsistent with international law. The Palestinian side is strongly opposed to this series of U.S. policies.

In January 2020, the U.S. announced its vision for peace in the Middle East, and various discussions have been held in the international community; attention is being paid to future movements, including the resumption of dialogue between Israel and Palestine.

B The Government of Japan's Efforts

Japan, while working with the international community toward the achievement of a “two-state solution” that would enable Israel and Palestine to coexist in peace, has actively contributed through the three pillars of political dialogue with stakeholders, trust building among the parties, and financial support for Palestinians. As a unique Japanese initiative, Japan, setting the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park (JAIP) as a flagship project, has been promoting the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative, which is a medium- and long-term contribution to facilitate Palestinian economic independence through regional cooperation with Japan, Palestine, Israel, and Jordan. As of the end of 2019, 15 private Palestinian companies are operating in the JAIP, which has created approximately 200 jobs.

In addition, Japan is mobilizing the resources and economic development knowledge of East Asian countries to support Palestinian nation building through the Conference on the Cooperation among East Asian countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD).
The Third Senior Officials Meeting of the CEAPAD was held in Palestine in July. The conference serves as an opportunity for business meetings with Palestinian companies, and has also steadily achieved results, such as a signing ceremony for a memorandum of understanding on cooperation between the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and the Palestinian Chamber of Commerce.

(8) Israel

Israel excels in the development of advanced technology and innovation and holds importance for the Japanese economy. It is also an important country in the stability of the Middle East region. In recent years, Israel has been expanding its relationship with Asian countries, including Japan, as a part of its efforts to diversify its diplomacy. As a result, the cooperative relations between Japan and Israel have been strengthened exponentially in the economic front. The number of businesses and the amount and number of investments from Japan to Israel are increasing. In addition, the Embassy of Japan in Israel established the Japan Innovation Center under its auspices, and is engaged in providing active support for developing relationships between Japanese and Israeli corporations.

General elections were held in Israel in April and September, but no agreement to form a government was reached, and another general election was held in March 2020. Despite this uncertainty about domestic politics, Japan and Israel are, based on Prime Minister Abe’s visit to Israel in May 2018, promoting the construction of multi-faceted relations, including political and economic relations. Approximately 200 people from 100 Japanese companies accompanied Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Seko Hiroshige’s visit to Israel in January 2019. In September a Memorandum on Protection of Information for the Exchange of Classified Information on Defense Equipment and Technology between the Ministry of Defense of Japan and the Ministry of Defense of Israel was signed. In addition, direct charter flights between Narita and Tel Aviv were operated in September and December, and direct flights by El Al Israel Airlines are also planned to begin in 2020. The exchange of high-ranking officials between Japan and Israel has also continued to flourish, as in May when Israeli Attorney General Mandelblit visited Japan, while in August the official delegation of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives and in December State Minister for Foreign Affairs Suzuki visited Israel.

(9) Palestine

Based on the Oslo Accords of 1993 and other agreements, the Palestinian Authority (PA) began self-government rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip from 1995. Prime Minister Abbas assumed office as President after the presidential elections held in January 2005. After that, however, relations between the Fatah led by President Abbas and Hamas deteriorated, and Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip by military force. Through Egypt’s mediation efforts, Fatah and Hamas reached an agreement in-principle in October 2017 to transfer power in the Gaza Strip to the PA. However, the agreement has not been implemented and the division remains, with the West Bank still held by Fatah and the Gaza Strip remaining effectively under Hamas control.
In October 2019 Prime Minister Abe had a meeting with President Abbas, who visited Japan to attend the Ceremony of the Enthronement of His Majesty the Emperor, and President Abbas also had dinner with Foreign Minister Motegi. During these opportunities, they widely exchanged views on the issue of peace in the Middle East and discussed support for Palestine, including the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative led by Japan.

In December State Minister for Foreign Affairs Suzuki visited Palestine and, in addition to meeting with President Abbas, Prime Minister Shtayyeh, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Malki, he also visited the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park (JAIP) and received an explanation about the JAIP’s current status from Minister of National Economy Osaili.
Japan in the Middle East, 2017-2021

Bringing Hope to Gaza: Inviting Teachers from the Gaza Strip, Palestine, to Japan

Prime Minister Abe announcing the invitational program for teachers from Gaza, at the UN General Assembly (September 2018, New York, U.S.; Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)

“At the beginning of 2019, we will invite to Japan approximately ten elementary and junior high school teachers from the Gaza Strip. This will be the first such group and we will continue to invite teachers annually.”

This announcement was made by Prime Minister Abe at the UN General Assembly held in New York, the U.S., in September 2018. Palestine, in the Middle East, is not familiar to many of the Japanese people. What is happening in the Gaza Strip, and what has Japan begun to do?

Palestine consists of two areas separated by Israel which lies in between: the West Bank of the Jordan River, and the Gaza Strip that is adjacent to the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt. In addition to the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian sides since 1948, the region has also been affected by internal rivalry between Palestinian factions since 2007. As a result, the Gaza Strip has suffered from an enclosed environment for more than ten years, and its humanitarian and economic conditions continue to deteriorate. Amidst the unstable situation with unemployment rate exceeding 40%, the situation surrounding the people of Gaza has become intolerable, especially with regard to the sense of hopelessness among youths in the region.
The international community, including Japan, has to address the crisis that is present “right there and now” through food assistance and other forms of support. At the same time, however, from the medium- to long-term perspective, Palestine faces the pressing challenge of creating a sound educational environment so that the youths who bear the future of Palestine on their shoulders do not lose their hope for the future and their dignity as individuals.

Half a year after Prime Minister Abe’s address at the UN General Assembly, ten teachers from the Gaza Strip arrived at Narita International Airport on March 2, 2019. During their stay lasting about a week, they were lectured by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare about Japan’s educational system and human resource development, visited the Tokyo Metropolitan School Personnel in Service Training Center and other sites, and deepened their knowledge about education in Japan. In Hiroshima, they visited Noboricho Elementary School, which is putting an emphasis on peace education. In addition to experiencing how education for peace is implemented in practice, the teachers also deepened their interaction with the children, such as by observing the serving of school meals.
In his address at the UN General Assembly, Prime Minister Abe stated that, “Once 20 years pass, there will be 200 teachers who will have experienced visiting Japan. The number of students taught by them will number in the thousands.” By continuing this invitation program for teachers from the Gaza Strip, the “Japan” that these teachers learn about during their stay is expected to spread gradually across the Gaza Strip. For the children of Gaza, this will definitely become an inspiration for the world outside they have yet to see, as well as their hope for the future. These children will also become the foundation for a solid relationship between Japan and Palestine in the future.

MOFA will continue to provide assistance and support to Palestine through various projects, including inviting teachers from the Gaza Strip to Japan.
Chapter 2
Japan's Foreign Policy by Region

Section 7 The Middle East and North Africa

1 Overview

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

Meanwhile, the region has gone through various conflicts and disputes along its history, and still faces a number of destabilizing factors and challenges. Regional tension is growing over Iran, and political turmoil continues in various regions since the “Arab Spring” in 2011. Fighting continues in Syria, resulting in a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons, and it has made a great impact on the stability of the entire region, including its neighboring countries. In Yemen, severe security and humanitarian conditions continue as the Houthis clash with the Yemeni Government and the Arab Coalition (led by Saudi Arabia, etc., at the request of the Yemeni Government). The risk of the spread of violent extremism such as the “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)” also remains in some areas. On the other hand, some changes from the current situation were seen in 2020. In the context of the Middle East Peace, which has been a historical issue since the founding of Israel in 1948, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco have agreed to normalize diplomatic relations with Israel. Regarding Afghanistan, the U.S. and the Taliban reached an agreement in February, and the Afghan government has been engaged with the peace negotiation with the Taliban since September.

The Biden administration of the U.S., inaugurated in January 2021, has announced that it will hold talks with Iran to return to the Iran nuclear deal, from which former President Donald Trump had withdrawn. Regarding the Middle East Peace, the Biden administration is also making efforts to improve relations with Palestine, and these policies are worth noting in terms of the impact over the region.

Japan imports approximately 90% of its crude oil from the Middle East, and it is extremely important for Japan’s peace and prosperity to promote peace and stability in the Middle East and to maintain and develop good relations with countries in the region. From this point of view, Japan in recent years has been striving to strengthen relations with Middle Eastern countries in a wide range of fields, not just the economy, but also politics, security, culture and people-to-people exchanges, among others. In January, as
tensions increased in the Middle East against the backdrop of the conflict between the U.S. and Iran, Prime Minister Abe visited the three countries of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Oman as part of diplomatic efforts to avoid further worsening of situations.

Prime Minister Abe meeting with Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (January 12, Ulah, Saudi Arabia; Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office)

In addition, while diplomatic activities have been restricted due to the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), Japan is providing assistance to the Middle East with approximately 122 million US dollars in ODA to counter COVID-19. Japan has been introducing such assistance and stressing the importance of addressing the issue based on the concept of human security especially in vulnerable regions, at international conferences by ministers.
The **Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research** explored Palestinian-Japanese relations by establishing a joint Palestinian-Japanese working group made up of experts and academics to engage in a dialogue on the various facets of the relationship with the aim of proposing a joint vision on how to strengthen and advance that relationship in a manner that helps it meet the challenges of the future. This initiative sought to examine *Japan’s role in the Middle East by focusing on Japanese-Palestinian Relation through a Joint Japanese-Palestinian second track policy workshops and consultation*.

The dialogue took place in two online workshops to discuss the current relationship and explore ideas and policies for the future. In addition, the effort included the preparation and publication of various background reports and working papers addressing some aspects of the current relationship. PCPSR also issued two reports summarizing the presentations and discussion of the two workshops as well as the recommendations of the second workshop.