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Palestinian Center for
POLICY and
SURVEY RESEARCH



*WORKSHOP I: Palestinian-
Japanese Relations, toward a Joint
Vision for the Future*

**Report on the
Presentations and
discussion of the First
Workshop of the
Joint Palestinian-
Japanese Working
Group**

March 2022

Prepared by Khalil Shikaki

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PCPSR's Publications of the Joint Working Group on Palestinian-Japanese Working Group

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)**

PCPSR, **Official PA-PLO Positions on Japanese-Palestinian Relations: recent statements on the Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process and Palestinian-Japanese Relations**

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**

Khalil Shikaki, **Palestinian Public Perception of Japan: Report on Results of a Public Opinion Poll among Palestinians, December 2021**

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

PCPSR, **Report on the Presentations and discussion of the First Workshop of the Joint Palestinian-Japanese Working Group, January 2022**

PCPSR, **Report on the Presentations and discussion of the Second Workshop of the Joint Palestinian-Japanese Working Group, March 2022**

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**

Report on the Presentations and discussion of the First Workshop of the Joint Palestinian-Japanese Working Group

The first workshop of the Joint Palestinian-Japanese Working Group was conducted via Zoom on 26 January 2022 with participants joining from five cities, Tokyo, Ramallah, Gaza, Jericho, and Washington DC. The workshop discussed ways to strengthen the relationship between Palestine and Japan, to search for effective means of strengthening Palestinian society, economy and public institutions. A second workshop took place on 2 March and discussed specific policy recommendations raised during the presentations, discussions, and background papers. These policy recommendations are listed in report that covers the proceedings of the second workshop.

Participants

The following is a list of the participants in the workshop in the order of presentation:

1. Dr. Khalil Shikaki, director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Ramallah, Palestine
2. Mr. Ryoji Tateyama, Professor Emeritus, National Defense Academy of Japan
3. Mr. Omar Sha'ban, founder and Director, Palthink, Gaza Strip
4. Mr. Hiroyuki Suzuki, Associate Professor, the University of Tokyo
5. Mr. Mohammad Daraghmeh, Asharq news bureau chief – Palestine
6. Ms. Tomoko Ohji, Editor & Senior Staff Writer, Mainichi newspaper
7. Mr. Raja Khalidi, Director General of MAS (Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute)
8. Dr. Aiko Nishikida, Associate Professor, Keio University
9. Dr. Abdel Nasir Makky, formerly with JICA
10. Mr. Toshiya Abe, Chief Representative of JICA Palestine Office
11. Dr. Ali Jarbawi, Professor and director of Ibrahim Abu Lughod Institute of International Studies, Birzeit University
12. Mr. Tsuji Kohei, NHK Washington Correspondent

Presentations

1. Dr. Khalil Shikaki:

The two main threats to Palestinian-Israeli relations and to Palestinian state building that are relevant to Palestinian-Japanese relations are those related to the two-state solution and Palestinian state building. That solution is under a severe threat due to settlement expansion and lack of a diplomatic process of negotiations since 2014 and the Palestinian state building

confront recurring and growing ramifications of three domestic problems: the split between the WBGS; a growing slide to authoritarianism and bad governance; and a weak economy threatened now by the Coronavirus crisis added on top of diminished donor support during the past few years.

Clearly, Japan and the international community are required to make an effort to keep the option of the two state solution alive. Alternatively, they force Israeli to confront a choice either end its occupation or grant the Palestinians equal rights.

I say this knowing that the international community does not have the courage to stand up to Israel and force it to make the choice; and this of course includes Japan. The international community subordinates Palestinian rights and needs to concerns for Israeli politics or needs. As a result, Israel acts with impunity & Palestinians continue to suffer.

As independent Palestinian and Japanese thinkers, we can identify few short and midterm threats and opportunities and make them the subject of Palestinian-Japanese dialogue. In doing so, we should put forward concrete steps for Joint PA-Japan activities, for example, expand and strengthen the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity initiative, explore ways of supporting the Gaza Strip by supporting civil society and the private sector, and explore ways of strengthening the PA by upgrading Palestinian-Japanese diplomatic relationship.

2. Professor Ryoji Tateyama:

The two-state solution is ideally the best way to settle conflict. But the foundation for this solution has now been eroded due to gradual settlement expansion, Palestinian split, absence of elections, and the PA loss of legitimacy. This leads to several questions: Is the two-state solution still feasible? What is the alternative? Is it more feasible? How can we keep the vitality of the Palestinian community?

In a recent policy recommendation paper we concluded that no breakthrough in the foreseeable future. We concluded that there is a need to change Japan's role: The current Japanese approach to the question of supporting the Palestinians is a top down one. We need to add to it a bottom up one, an approach that seeks to enhance the resilience of Palestinian people and society. In this regard, Japan should also support Palestinian human rights and civil society and address other governance issues.

3. Mr. Omar Sha'ban:

In the Gaza Strip, there is little visibility for the Japanese assistance to the Palestinian people and the PA. There is a need for greater visibility. Gazans clearly support JICA's work and appreciate it. They see Japan is a pioneer in some sectors, such as solid waste and medical waste treatment and in the educational sector. But they see a decreased JICA assistance at a time of worsening conditions in the Gaza Strip, particularly in the health sector.

Three areas can be improved with Japan's support:

(1) work to help civil society is essential and JICA needs to shift policy to support and partner with civil society organizations. These are key service provider; they continue to work during wars, and supporting them represents an effective entry to the entire society.

(2) Little work is currently underway with the productive sector. This sector is the key for job creation. Gaza has 20,000 fresh graduates every year. The private sector creates jobs and fight radicalization. The IT sector is advanced and Japan should partner with it. It should also partner with the fishing and agricultural sectors. Given the brain drain in the health sector, there is a need to work with that sector, particularly in training of new doctors.

(3) Transfer the great experience of Japan in the reconstruction after the 2nd world war, not only by providing concrete assistance, but more importantly on the management aspect of the reconstruction process itself: urban planning, team work, involving of the municipalities, private sector and other community segments.

4. Professor Hiroyuki Suzuki:

Three developments are impacting Japan's relationship with Palestine:

(1) *Growing economic relations between Japan and Israel:* The current relationship between Japan and Palestine is defined by the relationship between Japan and Israel. In the 1970s and 80s, the first stage of the relationship, Japan's relationship with the Arab countries determined the Japanese diplomacy toward Israel. In the last ten years, Japanese approach toward Palestine and Israel has changed. Current economic ties between Japan and Israel could affect the relationship between Japan and Palestine. In 2016, private investments from Japan to Israel totaled around \$200 million, but last year it was reported that the amount has reached around \$3 billion.

(2) *Japanese-Palestinian people to people relationship:* Japan provides financial assistance, technological support, and emergency aid. But it would be more desirable to expand job training opportunities for Palestinians in Japan, or even to increase employment opportunities, and to promote exchange in the economic and academic field by accepting each civilian from both societies. Human interaction between Japanese and Palestinians is key for the development of the relationship despite the limitations such as entry visa.

(3) *Role of civil society:* Since the activities of civil society organizations have been successful in areas where Japanese official institutions cannot be involved, such as educational support in East Jerusalem, it is desirable to support such activities.

5. Mr. Mohammad Daraghme:

The presence of Japan in the Palestinian media is evident in some areas but not in others. The coverage of Japan's support is widespread and the presence of ambassadors is well received. Projects like the Jericho mosaic, the assistance to the Gaza Strip, the Corridor of Peace and

Prosperity initiative, and JAIP are covered extensively. But there is little coverage on cultural aspects except among the intellectuals. Writers and novelists know very well the Japanese literature. Novels' summaries are published but not in the mass media. Little is known about the culture, customs, and the people of Japan in the Palestinian media.

The need exists for more contacts at the cultural sectors and at the popular level in order to create a greater awareness among the Palestinian media outlets and the cultural institutions.

6. Ms. Tomoko Ohji:

Current conditions in Palestine and Israel are not encouraging. Israel is not likely to embark on a diplomatic process to advance peace. But little steps and confidence building measures aimed at improving the economic situation might provide some opportunities. This is possible given the fact that the governing coalition in Israel includes parties from the center and the left and not only from the right wing.

There's room for a greater role to be played by outside actors, including Japan. More specifically, there is a need for pressure from Japan and the rest of the international community to encourage Israel to take steps to curtail settlement building, home demolitions and evictions in East Jerusalem.

As for Japan's relationship with the Palestinians, hi tech should be an area of focus. There is greater potential for the Palestinian high-tech sector to thrive in cooperation with Japanese hi tech companies. This would keep skilled Palestinian workers at home, in their communities giving them the opportunity to thrive there.

Business leaders are now more optimistic about investment in the region. With its investment in Israel growing, Japan is an increasingly important partner and it should leverage that to boost ties with the Palestinian business community as well, through joint ventures and cooperation particularly in the high-tech sector. A two-sided approach would also invest in social capital, in order to help build a psychological immune system for Palestine by supporting greater sustainability of the community, particularly among the Palestinian youth.

7. Mr. Raja Khalidi:

The current conditions in Palestinian-Israeli relations provides no political horizon. Neither the two- nor the one-state solutions are feasible given the asymmetric relationship between the two sides. Yet, donor assistance has been linked to the peace process of the two-state solution, a process that is now dead. If process is dead, why is aid continuing? Aid prolongs the status quo of the occupation while keeping the PA in place. While donors do provide other types of support, the linkage to the peace process should be reassessed. Instead, aid should focus on rights, national and socio-economic rights and civil liberties for Palestinians.

One third of Japan's assistance went to governance, such as institution building and the judiciary. Given the mediocre government services, this form of aid is costly, delivers intangible results, and should be carefully scrutinized in future programing. Palestinian stalled governance should

lead us to conclude that economic reform should put the private sector and civil society in the driving seat alongside a revived public sector, instead of being spectators. The Corridor of Peace and Prosperity initiative is excellent due to its developmental dimensional content, the linking of agriculture and industry, the intelligent use of space. This should continue, but it should not be used as a vehicle to install economic peace under the noble slogan of regional cooperation.

On the other hand, regional cooperation risks putting the economy cart before the peace horse. These have been the policies pursued by Netanyahu, Trump, and now the Bennet government. In this light one should ask about the goals of confidence building measures. Exactly what are Palestinians expected to build confidence in with a government that is committed to neither pursuing peace nor allowing Palestinian sovereignty? Economic facilitation of their inalienable rights? It seems they serve to maintain the status quo without a link to peace.

Resilience is a useful concept to serve as a guide for assistance. Palestinians viewed “somood,” or steadfastness, as the means for the people in Palestine to remain on their land and in their homes. However, resilience should no longer be simply a reactive strategy. It is a concept that should empower Palestinians to resist economic peace; one that strengthens the poor and vulnerable, empowers the domestic productive base sector, integrates latest technology, enables local and regional economic development, enables sovereign economic institutions and policies. This is an emancipatory resilience.

8. Dr. Aiko Nishikida:

Having taught at Japanese universities for the last 10 years, it is clearly felt that the interest among the Japanese students in the Palestinian issue is declining recently. Concerning the Japanese broadcast as well, we hear less news about Palestinian-Israeli conflict compared to the newer developments broadcast about Syria or the other regions since 2010s . Moreover, one should not expect any big moves from the Japanese government as it follows the US diplomatic lead. Given the fact that the US administration under President Biden is not focusing on the Middle East, little new political steps can be expected from the Japanese side on the Palestinian issue.

However, while this does not seem to be a top governmental priority, protection of human rights of Palestinians remains an important issue for Japanese NGOs. In this regard, one should encourage Japanese civil society’s participation in socio-economic support by presenting the government with attractive proposals for civil-public cooperation.

9. Dr. Abdel Nasir Makky:

There is evidence of great public appreciation of the Japanese support, particularly in Jerich and the Jordan Valley (JV). JICA’s work in JV goes back to 2005, with its local government project. JICA expanded its role in the VJ in 2006 with the launching of the Corridor of Peace and Prosperity which represented Japan’s framing of its assistance to the PA in a regional context involving Israel and Jordan. The choice of the place, JV, was a good one due to the strategic importance of that area for Palestinian statehood and economic prosperity and because of the

little PA investment efforts despite the great Israel threat to that area. One of the benefits of choice of that area by Japan has been the interest shown by other donors in the area and the greater PA attention to it.

Meetings with heads of local government and the investors in JAIP led to the conclusion that despite the appreciation of Japan's role, more work needs to be done. A need exists to develop further the clusters of local councils and strengthen the Corridor initiative. The relevant actors expressed a desire for greater consultation with them and faster implementation of projects. Moreover, they requested greater focus on sectors that are important to the JV such as access to water, electricity, schools, and health services.

Recommendations:

1- The Corridor for Peace and Prosperity and the Agro-industrial Park should support the local government units (LGUs) in Jericho and Jordan Valley and support the citizens in the Valley against the threat of annexation. Israel has long prepared the ground for the annexation of the border territory, building a network of highways such as the Allon Road to separate the Jordan Valley from the rest of the West Bank. The areas slated for annexation amount to around one-third of the West Bank and include a 97 km stretch along the border with Jordan, including two crossings - the Sheikh Hussein Bridge and the al-Karameh Bridge, also known as the Allenby crossing. Annexation of the Jordan Valley could effectively kill whatever hopes remain for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - long the focus of international diplomacy - as it would render completely impossible the establishment of a viable, contiguous Palestinian state.

2- All the projects that had been agreed to in the Interim Local Development Strategy (ILDS) by the citizens and the PA in 2010 should be implemented as the second round of the assistances by the Government of Japan. According to the ILDS, many of the projects will support the citizens of Jordan Valley to stay in their land against the Israeli planning to control over the area and to stand against the Annexation plan.

3- It seems that the Israeli government is not interested in supporting the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity for security and political reasons and it put many obstacles in front of the plan especially the matter of the access road to Allenby bridge from JAIP. Realizing this fact, the government of Japan should take concrete measures to pressure the Israeli government to allow the building of the access road.

10. Mr. Toshiya Abe:

JICA's assistance occurs with the context of the two state solution. The focus has been on human development and capacity building as it has trained some 6700 Palestinians in the last 30 years. The emphasis of the assistance has been on three priority areas: human security, social services, and economic development covering sectors like health, education, refugees, local government, industry, agriculture, and tourism, with fishery being considered for the future. The assistance has two dimensions, the top down and the bottom-up support, supporting the PA and the Palestinian community. JICA's efforts aim at encouraging the resilience of the Palestinians.

But the challenges are complex, beginning with the loss of momentum of the two-state solution to navigating existing rules governing Palestinian-Israeli relations and difficulties encountered in the business environment.

In the future, we have to make greater efforts to raise visibility, connect the Palestinian and Japanese people in IT and agricultural industries, and promote tourism and cultural exchange; encourage the business communication and Japanese business invest in Palestine. JICA is open to investing in more projects in the Gaza Strip, in the industry, fishery and agriculture and are interested in exploring ideas for further cooperation in that area.

But in doing so, we should realize that while the older Japanese public, those in the 50s and 60s, demonstrate solidarity with the Palestinians, the young generation is not familiar with present situation in Palestine due to the complexity of the conflict. We need to find means of overcoming this challenge and reach out to the Japanese youth.

11. Dr. Ali Jarbawi:

The two-state solution is dead. But the international community continues to resist this conclusion because the two-state framework provides the means of managing the conflict and avoiding putting pressure on Israel. In the current context of political stagnation, it turns confidence building measures that helps maintain the status quo. The international aid prevents an eruption of the current low-intensity conflict into an open violence.

For the Palestinians, one of the deficiencies of the aid is the fact that it needs a prior approval from Israel. The regional cooperation frame provides Israel with the means to exercise this control over international aid.

In order to advance Palestinian-Japanese cooperation, we need to discuss three important issues: how to expand the assistance; how to make it a direct bi-lateral Palestinian-Japanese cooperation without Israeli involvement and prior involvement; and, how can make it more concentrated and efficient, spent where it is truly needed and can make a difference.

12. Mr. Tsuji Kohei:

It is useful to bring the perspective from outside of the Middle East. The Biden Administration has shifted back its policy of peace process to the traditional course including resuming aid to Palestinians. At the same time, the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian issue is not high on their agenda. On the other hand, in the US, there has been a seismic shift to pro-Palestine in both Congress and the public. A growing number of people challenge Israel today. Progressives in the US Congress talk openly against Israel which is unprecedented. There is grassroots support for these politicians as well. A public poll also shows that 43% say the US should apply pressure on Israel.

Unfortunately, there has been a significant change in media attention as well. After the Arab Spring, the Israeli-Palestinian issue has become one of the issues in the Middle East instead of

the issue, as it used to be, which led to a decrease in media coverage. There may be a need for more effort to make to convince the Japanese public to maintain the amount of assistance.

When we look at Japan, there has been a change in Israel's image. It has improved significantly as the nation of innovation and start-ups, not military occupation. Japan's economic investments in Israel have exploded.

While it is the case that the Japanese public is generally sympathetic to Palestinians, one should not take for granted the trend would continue at the same level without effort. In this regard, we should make aid more visible to the public in Japan so that citizens can witness the positive impact it brings. It is worthwhile to invest in the high tech sector as it is one area in which Palestinians can circumvent various challenges they face from occupation including restrictions of movement. Palestinians should do their part by directly reaching out to the Japanese people.

Discussion:

The discussion focused on the following areas:

1) Overcoming Israeli restrictions: How to overcome the Israeli restrictions that impede Japan's efforts, such as those encountered in the implementation of the Corridor initiative in JAIP, and how to navigate the legal and political restrictions imposed by the Oslo agreement and the Paris Protocols which Japan cannot ignore in its cooperation with the Palestinians. What can be done when existing Palestinian-Israeli agreements turn obsolete and become a hinderance. Or perhaps, to avoid the Israeli impediment, Japan's aid should simply focus on what is doable given the Israeli constraints?

2) East Jerusalem: How to empower the Japanese NGOs and open a channel for assistance in critical places like East Jerusalem that is not under PA control. Japan's role in this area can focus on strengthening the resilience of the Palestinian community, help East Jerusalemites and their NGOs maintain their culture and national character. Can JICA itself work in East Jerusalem? Should it test the ground and examine its ability to do so or should it coordinate this with the relevant and experienced Japanese and Palestinian NGOs?

(3) The role of the two-state solution framework: Is the two-state framework an asset (e.g., providing a legal and a political context for assisting the Palestinians) that should be maintained? Or is it a burden that should be disregarded or replaced because the focus of aid on the goal of the two-state solution hinders aid effectiveness, sustains the status quo, and prolong occupation? If this framework is more hypothetical and a matter of principle rather than a near term political prospect, should we, Japanese and Palestinians alike, acknowledge this fact and act accordingly or should we maintain a "fictional" framework because it provides a legal and a political utility facilitating the allocation of assistance to the Palestinians? If the framework is disregarded, can Japan find the means of convincing its public of the need to continue to provide aid? If the framework is dead, what should replace it? Can a rights-based framework, one focused on strengthening the resilience of the Palestinians, find a legal and institutional structure in Palestinian-Japanese relations despite the determination of the PA to protect the two-state framework? Can a rights-based approach operate if Israel rejects it? If not, would Japan be

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prepared to engage Israel in a dialogue, involving use of leverage, whose goal is to grant the Palestinians equality?

4) Palestinian reach out to the Japanese public: How can the Palestinians reach out to the Japanese people, what messages? How to start a people-to-people campaign? What role for university, cultural, and artistic exchanges, journalists' visits, civil society and solidarity visits, etc. How to talk to the Japanese youth about Palestinian rights in language and concepts that draws parallels with their own country's history and changing relations with the world?

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 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.

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