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Comments on Japan's Assistance to Afghanistan

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Abstract

The size and forms of assistance to Afghanistan by Japan after the 9.11 terrorist attacks to the United States of America as well as its basic policy on the country were decided by the summer 2002, and have unchanged until now. The main reason for this is lack of attention of the higher authorities and mass media in Japan. Since last year summer, those attention has soared the second time. This, together with a new strategy of the U.S.A. opens a precious opportunity for Japan to change the policy towards Afghanistan and adjust its assistance to the grand situation of the country. The discussion paper raises seven points on Japan's assistance to Afghanistan: attention by the higher authorities and mass media; volume; strategy; local coordination; capacity; Afghanistan's ownership; and security. And it draw lessons from the past assistance of Japan and discusses on its possible future assistance based on the author's experiences as director in charge of the Foreign Ministry of Japan and Deputy Chief of Mission in Kabul and his researches since summer 2004.

When the 9.11 terrorist attacks to the United States in 2001 occurred, I was Director of the Second Middle East Division, Japanese Foreign Ministry, which deals with Afghanistan. Since that time, I had deeply been involved in planning and implementing Japanese foreign policy towards peace and stability of Afghanistan as

Director and as Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM)of the Japanese Embassy in Kabul by summer 2004. After I left Kabul for good, I have been following the situation of Afghanistan and the Japanese assistance to Afghanistan as a professional fellow of the Weatherhead East Asia Institute of Columbia University in New York and then as an academic of Kureme University. The followings are my comments on Japan's assistance to Afghanistan based on my experiences and researches.

1. Attention by the higher authorities and mass media

Japan's assistance to Afghanistan has been affected by the strength of attention by the higher authorities and mass media of Japan in the term of decision making of size and forms of assistance. Their attention to the issue of Afghanistan was the highest for less than one year after the 9.11 terrorist attacks. In October 2002, two weeks after I arrived as DCM of the Japanese Embassy one of the Diet members of the Democratic Party visited Kabul and said to me, "Nobody cares Afghanistan now except me. Political attention was turned to Iraq."

During those nine to ten months, Japan made several political moves. Japan clearly accused a barbarian act of terrorism by the Al-Qaeda and contributed to forming coalition against terrorism by dispatching the Prime Minister's special envoys to Islamic countries in the Middle East and Central Asia. The Diet of Japan passed the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law to allow the Japan Self-Defense Maritime Force to make replenishment support to vessels engaged in the counter-terrorism Maritime Interdiction activities in the Indian Ocean. In cooperation and coordination with the United States, the European Union, Saudi Arabia, and the United Nations, Japan played a significant role to form a reconstruction process for Afghanistan, which led to the Tokyo International Conference for Afghanistan Reconstruction.

Most importantly for the officials and experts getting engaged in assistance implementation, the size and forms of assistance by Japan were decided in this period, and have unchanged until now. Japan made US\$ 1.46 billion of assistance to Afghanistan by the end of 2008 since September 2001, which was almost equivalent to US\$ 200 million. At the Tokyo conference, Japan made a pledge of US\$ 500 million for two and a half years. In addition to humanitarian assistance, Japan set three pillars for its assistance to Afghanistan, namely contributions to the political process, security sector reform, and reconstruction, although the Foreign Ministry of Japan calls these the

former two areas 'Democratic Process' and 'Security Improvement' now. Besides, the means of assistance has not changed: use of ODA present schemes.

It is at the present time since last year that the political and public attention soared second time. It was reported summer last year that the United States requested Japan to dispatch a transport unit of military helicopters for logistic support for the International Security Assistance Force or to provide US\$ 20 billion financial assistance to the security improvement. Since then, I have closely watched the discussions of the politicians and officials from the viewpoint whether Japan can change the size or/and forms of assistance or not.

2. Volume

Japan is the third largest donor to Afghanistan now. However, Japan was the second largest contributor after the United States. At the Tokyo conference, Japan made a pledge of US\$ 250 million for the first year while the United States did that of just less than US\$ 300 million. From that time the size of Japanese assistance in the financial term has not changed or been stable while the other countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom rapidly increased their contributions. In fact, I was astonished to know that the United States pledged US\$ 2 billion of assistance only for reconstruction in the middle of 2003, though the contents and volume of implementation was criticized by the press and researchers in the United States.

Afghanistan has been one of the least recipients of foreign assistance as a post-conflict country per capita. It received far below compared with Bosnia and East Timor.

Excuse of the international community for this fact is that Afghanistan is far larger than other post-conflict countries such as Bosnia and East Timor in area and population. As for Japan, the financial shortage of the national budget is added for the excuse. Besides, political and public attention has been very low in Japan, as I previously mentioned.

Japan is the second largest economy in the world, being conscious about its moral obligation to contribute to issues in the world, even the time when the world economy is at a crisis. The political and public attention to Afghanistan is getting higher in Japan now. On the other hand, Afghanistan in a trouble is a least recipient of the foreign

assistance while it needs far more fund to tackle its problems such as security improvement, governance, and reconstruction. I am wondering why Japan does not try to increase its assistance level in the financial term.

3. Strategy

Japan had a strategy towards the post war situation of Afghanistan in the fall of 2001: to support the effort by Mr. L. Brahimi, United Nation Secretary General's Special Representative for Afghanistan to create a road for reconciliation and creation of a democratic government for all Afghans; and to create a reconstruction process popping up the political process.

After the reconstruction process started and the Bonn agreement was concluded, Japan developed a strategy for its assistance by setting priorities and making three pillars as mentioned above. Japan assumed that by making programs based on this strategy as a major promoter for creation of the reconstruction process it could properly contribute to peace and stability of Afghanistan.

The examples of assistance programs for this strategy were the followings: financial support for holding events stipulated in the Bonn agreement and technical support for broadcasting Emergency Loya Jirga (Grand National Assembly) in the political process; support for DDR, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, as lead nation in the security sector; and 'the Ogata Initiative (OI)', a comprehensive area development program and trunk road rehabilitation in reconstruction.

As you see in the volume of assistance, Japan seems not to have changed this strategy too. Japan recently announced its financial assistance to the presidential election scheduled to hold in coming August. This can be categorized as a support for the political sector. Japan has supported DIAG, disbandment of illegal armed groups, which is seen as a program complement to DDR in the security sector. The assistance to police reform can be seen as a new program but Japan has provided assistance to the police sector since 2002. A briefing paper of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, 'Japan's Assistance in Afghanistan: Achievements' notes infrastructure, basic human needs, and agriculture and rural development as sectors for its humanitarian and reconstruction assistance, but all the programs in these sectors are in the same line drawn in 2002.

The situation, especially security situation in Afghanistan has dramatically changed from the time of creation of the Japanese strategy on assistance to the country. Accordingly, the posture of the international assistance to Afghanistan has also changed. The role of the ISAF and UNAMA is getting larger and significant in assistance to the Government of Afghanistan. And the United States, the primary international actor, has been reviewing its strategy on Afghanistan and Pakistan in consultation with Afghanistan and its allies since the inception of the new administration. It is the time for Japan to review its strategy and change it in accordance with the ground needs for the international efforts.

4. Local Coordination

In every sector for nation-building of Afghanistan, coordination among the players from the Afghan official and private organizations and institutions, and the international civil and military communities has become very important. Each sector and each program has committees and sub committees with a secretariat. Those main and sub committees and a secretariat are participated in or staffed by governmental officials and officers, donor diplomats and experts, officials and experts of international organizations, and officers and civilian representatives of the ISAF and OEF-A.

This kind of coordination is conducted not only in the capital but also at provincial and district levels, which turns usually into formation of collaboration at each level. And as a result, only those who participate in coordination can participate in actual collaboration.

Japan has worked as lead nation in DDR and DIAG and held three international conferences on either DDR or DIAG in Tokyo. However, Japan is short of eligible personnel to participate in works of the committees and ANBP, Afghanistan's New Beginning Program. As a result of that, Japanese contribution to DIAG is little seen except the financial one. Even the large part of the financial assistance is used for the DIAG-related rural development, according to the ANBP report.

In humanitarian and reconstruction sectors, such shortage of personnel has been resolved by the efforts of the JICA office and its individual experts. In the medical and health care sector, this was very obvious to the eyes of the program assessment team which I participated in. However, it is very difficult for a JICA expert to go outside

Kabul and specific large cities and almost impossible to stay for technical cooperation in local cities due to the security reason, which means that Japanese experts can not participate in local coordination.

5. Capacity

I had misunderstood the term ‘technical cooperation’ until the recent time. The Japanese expression of Gijutsu Kyouryoku, which is usually translated into ‘technical cooperation’, indicates training courses either in Japan or in other countries including a recipient country and capacity building of institutions in a certain sector. In contrast, it seems that ‘technical cooperation’ in Western countries means assessment by an expert on specific field. The western experts come and make assessment reports and go back home.

The JICA technical assistance was once criticized as ineffective in the context of need for more direct assistance. A JICA expert has never become an assistant to Afghan senior officials or a researcher just to make an assessment report. Almost all the experts have worked for training Afghan nationals or for helping capacity building of institutions. This criticism is irrelevant. JICA has trained hundreds of teachers, doctors, nurses, midwives, radiograph experts, and technicians in other sectors.

Having said so, I have to admit that Japan lacks experts for certain areas. As for DDR, Japan has failed to send a senior expert to the ANBP in addition to failure to fill the post of Prof. K. Isezaki, who made a tremendous contribution to the initiation of DDR as a senior expert. This results in lack of personnel in coordination of DDR and DIAG in the committees and secretariat. This may be due to insufficiency of senior military experts for peace building operation who can speak foreign languages. Now that Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) accumulated the experiences on peace keeping and peace building operations, it is the time for it to produce eligible military experts for this kind of activities.

In other sectors other than DDR and DIAG, Japan failed to send a senior expert to advise the higher Afghan authorities. Senior advisors on macro-economy and finance were needed from the first stage of nation-building of this country but Japan failed to bring such a senior expert. Japan has a lot of experiences to develop economy and has a lot of economic advisors. If selection system for such an expert had been established,

Japan could have succeeded in posting a senior economic advisor in the Ministry of Finance or the Presidential office.

6. Afghanistan's Ownership

One of the largest problems for promoting the OI was how to build Afghan-driven nature in the program. As mentioned above, the OI aimed at comprehensive area development by UN humanitarian agencies with around US\$ 100 million. During the transitional government period, Dr. Ashraf Ghani, Minister of Finance closely watched humanitarian and reconstruction programs offered and implemented by foreign governments and UN agencies which might harm Afghanistan's ownership, and if he found one, he tried to take every measures to stop it or to make it hold Afghan-driven nature.

In the case of the OI, MRRD, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development led all the actors working under the program. MRRD developed a variety of NDPs, national development programs such as NSP, National Solidarity Program and NABDAP, National Area-Based Development Program. In coordination and cooperation with the Japanese Embassy in Kabul and UNAMA, MRRD held a workshop and following meetings attended by officials from local governments and local UN agencies' offices and succeeded in making the OI serve NDPs, especially NSP and NABDAP.

According to Japan's ODA guideline, Japan provides an ODA project when a recipient country requests it. In this sense, respect for ownership of a recipient country is not alien to Japan. The point in the OI was how to realize a comprehensive area development with Afghan-driven nature while local government institutions and officials did not have sufficient capacity to plan, implement, and assess a development project. The workshop gave participants, especially local government officials a precious opportunity to share a vision and to learn how to plan and assess projects.

However, only a part of the project proposals made by workshop participants was financed by Japan's headquarters partly because of lack of coordination in Japanese bureaucracy and partly because of lack of the proper fund in the budget for the recovery phase of post-conflict reconstruction.

The lessons on ownership in the OI are the followings:

- 1) Foreign and International Agencies tend to plan programs and projects presuming no or little capacity for nation building and to overlook local ability to contribute to it;
- 2) Workshops at both central and local levels can serve sharing a vision among foreign assistance experts and government officials and give an opportunity to educate both of them on how to work together; and
- 3) The officials working in the capital tend to put priority on forming projects, not understanding the importance of local-driven projects for self-development of a post-conflict country.

Afghanistan's Compact and Afghanistan National Development Strategy both presume Afghanistan's ownership of its nation-building. Under these frameworks, many committees, sub-committees and secretariats work at central and local levels. These institutes are not just a measure for coordination but also a tool for realizing ownership by the Afghans. I do not know cases of other countries and international organizations. But if Japan wants to implement its projects contributing to Afghanistan's nation-building, the officials at every level in the capital should learn roles for committees, sub-committees and secretariats and the reason for their creation. Otherwise, Japan will not play a role for Afghanistan's nation building other than that of fund provider.

7. Security

The deteriorating security situation has been the largest threat to reconstruction assistance. The Japanese government is extremely cautious about security for its rehabilitation projects. Japan does not have its own intelligence apparatus to judge the security in a country such as Afghanistan but tends to rely on intelligence reports provided by allied or friendly countries. The final judgment on the security situation for a reconstruction project is made by Tokyo, although the local Japanese embassy can express its own view. Any casualty, whether it is human or property, is unacceptable during implementation of a reconstruction project.

This attitude of Japan affected reconstruction activities:

- 1) Word of a threat to the Japanese research team working on the trunk road rehabilitation project came from an allied country, prompting an immediate withdrawal of the team and a three-month suspension of the project. This resulted in reducing the planned 150 km section to 50km and in assigning to Japan an

additional 115km of road rehabilitation;

- 2) As the security situation has worsened, however, JICA's assistance activities have been limited to the large cities in the northern and central regions of the country. As of the end of June 2008 JICA does not allow its experts to work in rural areas, and conducts trainers' training in Kabul, sending Afghan Trainees to Japan.

The Japanese Embassy in Afghanistan developed security measures for the road rehabilitation project before work started in August 2003. These measures covered information gathering and analysis; protection by the local police and private security, and the patrol and emergency evacuation plans of the US forces within coalition force; and efforts to win the support of local people for the projects. During the rehabilitation of the 50km road east from Kandahar, all the measures worked well but the key was support by the local people. The local people benefitted greatly in employment and improvement of social and economic facilities from the road rehabilitation and small projects for the district where the rehabilitating trunk road passes. They extended their support to the Japanese projects to protect their interests. Furthermore, as the Embassy's contacts with district shura (council) increased, so did the information on the situation of rural areas and the way of thinking of local people.

Unfortunately, the security situation worsened far more than the time I was posted in Afghanistan (2002-2004). As a result, Japan withdrew all the staff both in the public and private sectors stationed in Kandahar. It is supposed that all but a Japanese security company working for the 115km road rehabilitation project has no contact with local communities, leading to no original local information. This lack of original security information is not only in Kandahar but also in Nangarhar. At the end of August last year, one Japanese aid worker, Mr. Kazuya Ito of Peshawar-Kai, a Japanese NGO, was kidnapped and finally found to be killed in the northwest of that province. At that time, the Embassy got information only from the central government. In 2002-2004, the Embassy was able to make a direct contact with the NGO and to get direct information from the provincial government and police. In addition, the Japanese Embassy developed a very friendly relationship with the present governor of Nangarhar province, Mr. Guru Agha Sherzai when he was the governor of Kandahar province.

It is concluded that Japan has not only withdrawn Japanese assistance workers but also cut the information network on security. If Japan continues to hold this attitude, it will

not be in a position to contribute to security improvement except through fund, which is requested by the United States and NATO. For Japan cannot dispatch any military unit operating outside the ISAF bases because of constitutional and political reasons and thus the remaining measure Japan could take for contributing to improvement of the present security situation is to connect the local communities including tribal ones and the ISAF, which needs a change of the attitude of Japan.

I strongly recommend activation of the Japanese contacts nurtured in the past including those before 2001 and posting proper personnel able to do in Afghanistan for contributing to the work of ISAF and the Afghan government.

(End)