

Post-Arab Spring Political Changes in the Middle East and Japan's Response — Searching for a New Axis of the Peace-keeping System —

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Introduction

Since the end of 2010, “the Arab Spring” and subsequent political changes in the Middle East and Arab region have become a center of international attention. Although these political changes have exclusively been considered and discussed as the expression of the “political diversity in the Arab region,”¹ to date, this paper rather attempts to reconsider this historical conversion in the context of the regional and political uniformity of the Middle East.

The Middle East world is a region stretching more than 6,000 km east and west² that has certain uniformity. The elements of this “certain uniformity” include language (Arabic, Persian, Turkish, etc.), script (Arabic script in many cases), and religion (revealed religions such as Islam).

¹ Typical examples in Japan include Keiko Sakai (ed.), *Reading the Arab Upheaval: The Future of the People's Revolution* (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies Press, 2011).

² The distance from the west end, Rabat in Morocco, to the east end, Kabul in Afghanistan, is approximately 6,000 km in a straight line.

From the historical viewpoint, “the Middle East” is a concept originating in Europe, and its geographical region almost coincided with the territory of the Ottoman Empire except for the Balkan Peninsula. However, since the 1970s, this term has been used in Japan to refer generally to the region consisting of 17 Arab states (from Morocco to Iraq and Gulf countries), plus Iran, Turkey, and Israel, putting emphasis on the continuity of Arabic culture in the Maghreb and Mashreq.

This paper uses this common definition of the Middle East in Japan. In this definition, “the Arab region” refers to a group of nations inhabited by the majority by Arabs speaking Arabic as their native language, and it accounts for a predominant part of the western Middle East. By contrast, “the Islamic world” is a region inhabited by a majority of Muslims,³ which can sometimes form the geographical concept indicating a global area spreading from the African Continent to South Asia and Southeast Asia. Given the centrality of Mecca and Medina in Islam, this concept is also closely related to “the Middle East” as a matter of course.

Under these preconditions, this paper first discusses what was behind the “Arab Spring,” then provides an overview of the current situation with attention to ongoing developments especially in the eastern part of the Middle East (Iran, Afghanistan, GCC countries, etc.), and lastly examines how Japan should take active part in the future development in the Middle East.

1. The post-9/11 Middle East

When the social situation behind the “Arab Spring” in the Middle East throughout 2011 is discussed, the explosive spread of media, such as SNSs, YouTube, and mobile phones, is often pointed out as a major factor. However, this spread of new

³ For example, a precise and practical definition is provided by Yasushi Kosugi, *The Islamic World: Heritage, Rebirth and the Contemporary Dynamics* (Chikumashobo, 1998).

communications media is of course taking place all over the world almost simultaneously and is not limited to the Middle East. A more important factor is that specific political awareness is shared across the Middle East region, which has “certain uniformity,” as mentioned above.

When one addresses this issue, it is rather unnatural not to point out the U.S. terror attacks on September 11, 2001, and the developments initiated afterward—the stationing of the U.S. and ISAF troops mainly in Afghanistan and the “fight against terror”—as a critical turning point. What followed this were the Iraqi War starting in March 2003; the collapse of Saddam’s regime; U.S. President Obama’s declaration of the end of the war in Iraq in August 2010, which finally came after 150,000 had died as its victims over seven years; and the subsequent pullout process. War-related atrocities committed during this period on the pretext of “democratization” were fully communicated to every corner of the world, owing to the recent advancement of media. The messages that these reports passed along did nothing but spark concern about the future among people, especially the young generation, in Iraq and even across the Middle East region, especially the Arabic-speaking countries.

The politically radicalized Islamic movements suffered a setback in many parts of the regions over this period, while long-standing authoritarian regimes in Middle East countries became even more solid, leaving no prospects for democratization through election or other means. Under such circumstances, the militarization and military-oriented industrialization alone made steady progress in the Middle East, driven by the U.S. military industry advocating the “war on terror.” In particular, countries mainly in the east of Egypt including Gulf region have spent even more heavily on military expenditure than before over the decade after 2001.

2. Iranian Green Movement as a harbinger

It cannot be denied that the first national reaction to the internal and external

deadlock in Middle East countries was seen in Iran.

In order to understand the state of the things, let me provide a close observation of the process of the political movements in Iran before and after June 2009. Seyyed Mohammad Khātami, who served two terms as the President of Iran since 1997, left as the reformist force weakened. President Mahmūd Ahmadīnejād, who won the presidential election in 2005 with the support of Supreme Leader Khāmeneī, became extremely popular among ordinary citizens with his hard-line diplomacy, which was symbolized by his tough nuclear development negotiations and his rough remarks on Israel throughout the first term, and with domestic populism policy (which was in fact closely related to the expansion of the influence of the Revolutionary Guards). The predominant forecast by around April was that there would be no doubt about his being reelected.

On March 17, former President Mohammad Khātami finally declined to run for presidency, making Mir Hosein Mūsavī, who was almost retired from the political arena, almost the only reformist candidate. However, Mohsen Rezā'ī, a conservative close to Rafsanjani, announced to run against Ahmadīnejād on May 3. Since then, election campaigns via Facebook and other fast-spreading social media rapidly expanded primarily among young people and women in urban areas who supported Mūsavī.

By May 20, four people stood as candidates. As the voting day approached, the election campaigns quickly intensified, while Iran's first-ever presidential television debate scheduled from June 3 in the midst of reports on the rise in the popularity rating of candidate Mūsavī. On June 12, the voting day, the news media reported long lines of voters formed at polling places in Teheran and elsewhere in the country, and the voting hours were extended until 10:00 p.m.

Contrary to the initial expectation of incumbent President Ahmadīnejād's side,

which sought reelection with “loyal votes” in rural areas at a low voting rate, the authorities announced that the voting rate reached 85%. However, when Mūsavī expressed his prospects by saying, “I will win,” with nervous-looking face, skepticism over the election results began to rise.

The next morning, Ahmadīnejād’s “landslide victory” (with 66% of the votes) was reported. Immediately afterward, large protests were launched in Teheran and major provincial cities day after day until June 18. One on June 15 was particularly large, with one million people reportedly in attendance, although there was unrest in some cities, such as confrontation with demonstrators in support of Ahmadīnejād, who were mobilized by the government coincidentally. The number of people arrested by the security police, the Revolutionary Guards, and the Basīj (plainclothes militia) in the course of this series of protest was 2,000 according to the authority, and 4,000 according to the opposition.

During the Friday Prayer on June 19, Khāmeneī confirmed the victory of Ahmadīnejād and urged protesters to subside. However, this somewhat hasty decision raised criticism of Khāmeneī himself as well, causing the police authorities and the Basīj to take even more radical actions to quash civil protest movements. Amid this situation, a shocking video of the shooting of Nedā Āghā-Soltān, a 26-year-old woman who was killed on the spot while seeing the demonstration on June 20, was broadcast worldwide.

When the Guardians Council finally certified the election results on June 29, it seemed that protest movements would subside accordingly. However, a few hundreds of thousands of citizens joined rallies again on July 9 to mark the oil nationalization movement in 1952, strongly indicating that people’s anger was not temporary.

In light of these developments, Rafsanjānī, in his speech at the Friday Prayer on

July 17, criticized the police's violent suppression activities, taking sides with the protesters, and indirectly casted doubt on Khāmeneī's decision. Later on July 30, a memorial gathering to mark the 40th day since the death of Nedā was held in southern Teherān.

On August 15, Mūsavī announced the foundation of the "green hope" movement in an attempt to prepare for a prolonged movement. In the mean time, Karrūbī requested relevant authorities to investigate rape and torture of arresters in prisons. Newly elected President Ahmadīnejād submitted a list of nominees for his new cabinet on August 19. Many of the new cabinet members won the Parliament's vote of confidence on September 3, finally allowing the administration to overcome its first crisis after the election.

On December 20, cleric Montazerī, who was Iran's icon of reform and had been under house arrest in Qom, died, and his supporters staged a rally to mourn over his death. Protests were also planned on February 11, 2010, to celebrate the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, but demonstrations mobilized by the government overwhelmed them. Since then, protests have superficially subsided owing to the government's strong suppression of the opponents and severe regulation of the communications networks.

With Iranian government authorities still continuing full repression of protests and state control of SNSs and mobile phones, the state of free speech in the country has dramatically worsened since then. However, this does not mean a weakened demand for democratization among the Iranian people, as reflected in the fact that attempts to respond to the Arab Spring were made in Iran in February 2011 and thereafter.

3. Developments in Tunisia and Egypt

The first to undergo a political change in the Arab world since 2011 was Tunisia,

a small country located at the center of the Maghreb countries. Although being considered the most democratized regime in the region, Tunisia was also known for strict control and oversight of political activities through the secret police network.

Tunisia's Ben Ali government abruptly collapsed after 23 years, which began as it took over the power in 1987 from the nation's first president Bourguiba (in office from 1957 to 1987). As widely known, the collapse was initiated by an incident that took place on December 17, 2010, in the rural town of Sidi Bouzid, in which a street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi burned himself to death in protest against the humiliation inflicted by a female police officer.

Since then, protests were mounted almost every day by young people mobilized by Facebook and other social networks. The government collapsed easily when President Ben Ali fled the country on January 14 next year. The so-called Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia made an impact on the world and spread to several other Arab countries, including Egypt, shaking their regimes.

The Constituent Assembly election on October 23 ended with the victory of the moderate Islamic party Ennahda, leading to the appointment of Hamadi Jebali of Ennahda as Prime Minister on December 14.

Although Tunisia was expected to become the first to reestablish a stable regime among Arab countries, the nation has yet to restore public order and economic activities through subsequent developments. A riot was reported in the capital city of Tunis in June 2012, resulting in the imposing of a curfew. Given that this kind of slowdown after a regime change is more or less unavoidable, an economic slump due to a prolonged confusion is not desirable by any means. Prompt restoration of public order is urgently needed.

Meanwhile, in Egypt, the first major protests were staged on January 25, 2011, in places such as Tahrir Square in Cairo. President Mubarak was ousted as early as February 11, bringing an end to his 30-year-old regime. Since then, the country has been under interim military rulers. On November 28, the People's Assembly elections were held, in which Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic parties made a strong showing and attracted major attention.

The first round of presidential elections was held on May 28, 2012, and the leader of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party', Mursī, and former Prime Minister Ahmed Shafik, who was popular among the supporters of the old regime, went to the final round of election. Immediately afterward (June 2), a verdict of life sentence was issued for former President Mubarak, followed by the outbreak of protests to demand the death penalty. On June 14, Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court acknowledged flaws in last November's election, and based on this ruling, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces ordered the People's Assembly to dissolve. Some assumed this to be a blow to presidential candidate Mursī.

Nevertheless, in the runoff on June 24, Mursī was elected new President by a slim margin. This meant that the first "democratic election" in Egypt's history ended with a candidate from an Islamic party becoming new President. At present, attention is focused on Morsi's formation of a cabinet, which will serve as a guide in predicting the new administration's future policy.

Some argue that positioning President Morsi only as Islamist is too early because the Muslim Brotherhood has taken a realistic stance throughout the Mubarak era.⁴

⁴ For further information on this qualitative change of the Muslim Brotherhood during the Mubarak era, see Housam Darwisheh, "The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: Between New and Old Challenges," in Japanese, on the Website of IDE-JETRO (http://www.ide.go.jp/Japanese/Publish/Download/Seisaku/1203_darwisheh.html)

In any event, the Mursī administration's nature and future diplomatic policy are worthy of attention, given that Egypt has always been one of the major countries in the Middle East and a key ally of the U.S. since the peace treaty signed between Egypt and Israel in March 1979 in accordance with the Camp David Accords. A particular focus of attention would be on changes in diplomatic relations with Iran, which Egypt has essentially opposed.

4. Developments in Libya and Syria

The difficulty of political change in the Middle East and Arab world since 2011 has typically been seen in Libya and Syria. In one of these countries, the ruler was killed, and in another, even a road map to regime change is nowhere in sight. Despite such differences, both seem to face the same problem: many difficulties await them as they struggle to reconstruct the nation and restore public order.

In Libya, the first anti-government protests broke out in the eastern city of Benghazi on February 15, 2011. The Gaddāfi administration's fierce suppression of this movement triggered the launch of air strikes by multinational forces led by France, Britain, and the U.S. on March 19. The war situation thereafter seesawed back and forth for a while until Col. Gaddafi and others were killed by opposing forces on October 20. On October 23, Chairman Abdel-Jalīl pronounced the nation's liberation. However, unrest continued in Libya, as demonstrated by clashes between militias on April 3, 2012, which occurred in the western town of Zuwārah and killed more than 20 people. On June 11, the constituent assembly election, scheduled in six days, was temporarily postponed by the election committee, and the National Forces Alliance (NFA) led by the liberal Mahmoud Jibrīl won in the election on July 7.

Since Libya had no national structure under the rule of Col. Gaddāfi, it faces the difficult task of building a nation from scratch. What kind of government will the

new Libya organize? Can it ever unite provincial tribes into a single nation? Without a doubt, Libya is still at a crucial moment for the reconstruction of the country after long years of rule by a peculiar authoritarian regime.

In Syria, anti-government protests had been staged in rural cities since mid-March 2011. President Basshār Al-Assad fiercely quashed them by mobilizing troops, secret police and a militia called the *shabbiha*. The government suppression did not end after the entry of an observer mission of the League of Arab States in Damascus on December 26 in the same year. Following the meeting between former U.N. Secretary General Annan, as U.N. envoy, and President Assad on March 10, 2012, a truce between the government and the dissidents came into effect on April 12, but the administration's violation of human rights continued.

In response to the situation, the United Nations Security Council approved the dispatch of a 300-member mission of ceasefire observers on May 21, which was immediately followed by a massacre on May 27, in which more than 100 people were killed by Syrian forces in Houla in the western part of the country. Then, the government troops committed another atrocity on June 6, killing about 100 people in a village near Hama in the western part of the country. The battle between government forces and rebel troops continued thereafter, causing clashes almost every day. On June 26, President Assad finally announced that his country was in a state of war.

On July 18, Defense Minister Rajha, Deputy Defense Minister Asef Shawkat (President Bashar Al-Assad's brother-in-law), former Defense Minister Turkmani, and others were killed in a terrorist bombing in government facilities at the center of Damascus. The Syrian government quickly appointed a new defense minister and other senior officials. The fact that the opposition could reach so deep in the regime shook the government. Given that President Assad himself mentioned the possibility of using poison gas, it is undeniable that a regime change or shift was

already becoming a realistic issue for the government at that time. As of July 20, the death toll in Syria mainly arising from the suppression of human rights by government forces reached about 16,000 (estimated by the U.N.).⁵

The anti-government movement in Syria began with nonviolent protests against rule by a small group called the Alawis established over the long term since the era of President Hafez al-Assad (1971–2000), father of the incumbent president. However, as a result of escalation of the government's suppression, Syria now represents the most tragic consequence of the Arab Spring. Nevertheless, the international community has yet to present any effective solutions, and this holds especially true for the U.N., which has totally failed to function. One underlying geopolitical reason behind this is that none of the neighboring countries want a radical regime change in Syria.

5. Iran's nuclear issue and involvement in the Syrian problem

While Arab countries underwent these massive political changes, the Iranian situation did not indicate any pronounced change. Then, it suddenly began to develop on November 8, 2011, when IAEA Director General Amano submitted a report on the Iranian nuclear issue.

Since the report did not clear away the doubts about Iran's nuclear arms development, the U.S. intended to restrict Iranian oil exports by strengthening the ongoing economic sanctions on Iran, especially by adding international transactions with Iran's Central Bank to the list of sanctions. This forced importers of Iranian oil, including Japan, China, South Korea, and India, to take action. On November 27, the Iranian parliament voted to expel the British ambassador in retaliation for the strengthened sanctions. In response to this, "a group of protesters" attacked the British embassy on November 29, rapidly worsening Iran's relations with EU countries. In early 2012, Iran suggested the

⁵ *Asahi Shimbun* (editorial on July 21, 2012) and other sources.

possibility of blockading the Strait of Hormuz, an international oil transit route through which some 85 percent crude oil and 18 percent of LNG are being brought to Japan, and a strategically most important place. The U.S. countered this by dispatching the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln to the area, creating military tensions that are still present today.

How likely is Israel to carry out preemptive strikes against Natanz, Fordow, and other underground nuclear facilities scattered across Iran, by elevating its current cyber attacks? If Israel does this, it must be highly likely that Iran will launch some kind of military counterattacks.

U.S. President Obama probably wants to avoid by all means a situation in which Israel's preemptive strikes lead his country into an armed clash with Iran. On the other hand, Israel seems to have an intention of shifting attention away from diplomatic difficulties created since the Arab Spring by focusing on the Iranian nuclear issue. It should be noted that depending on the outcome of the U.S. presidential election, Romney's Republican administration with a pro-Israel stance in dealing with Iran may be formed. This scenario leaves room for significant change in the U.S. attitude toward Iran.

Meanwhile, the reality for Iran is that it has no effective diplomatic options except for relying on Russia and China to avoid U.N. Security Council resolutions on nuclear issues. Under such circumstances the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's meeting was held in Beijing on June 1 to 9, with the leaders of Russia, Iran, and Afghanistan among the attendants. Reportedly, Russia took advantage of this opportunity to discuss the Syrian problem with Iran in an effort to use Iran's traditional strategic alliance with Syria for working out any form of "resolution" to the extremely serious Syrian situation.⁶

⁶ "Russia Seeks Iranian Aid in Ushering Out Syria's Assad," *Bloomberg* (<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-06-06/russia-seeks-iranian-aid-in-usherin>)

For Russia and China, Iran is also in a geopolitical position to contribute to the stabilization of Afghanistan in 2014 and ahead. By contrast, even when the war situation in Afghanistan is entering a critical phase toward the pullout of U.S. and ISAF troops in 2014, the U.S. still lacks the channel of negotiation with Iran, which is potentially one of the most important countries concerned with Afghan issue.

6. Other major countries in the Middle East

How are non-Arab countries like Israel and Turkey responding to the wave of regime change in Arab countries? Which direction are GCC countries, especially Saudi Arabia, heading for, where signs of change were observed early in the Arab Spring but the regime's crisis has apparently been overcome through the government's strong repression of criticism and lavish welfare spending policies?

Israel, which has been treating Egypt as the largest ally since the Iranian revolution in 1979, seems to foresee that the "Egyptian revolution" will radically change their relations. At the same time, the domestic inclination toward the right is making a comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian problem even more difficult, creating a tendency to avoid discussion on the problem itself.

It is undeniable that the threat of nuclear weapons is particularly emphasized partly in order to break Israel's impasse at home and abroad. The possibility Israel fears the most at the moment is that the collapse of Syria's regime would substantially increase the fluidity of the political situation in Lebanon and other neighboring nations. With the crisis continuing in Syria, Israel's hard-line attitude toward Iran may be changed at least in the short term.

Amid changes since the Arab Spring, both Turkey and Saudi Arabia have

g-out-syria-s-assad.html, accessed on June 7, 2012).

increased their presence in their respective regions. Saudi Arabia has been taking positive action on the Syrian problem after taking over from Egypt the position as the largest ally of the U.S. in the Middle East, while being alert to the spread of the Arab Spring to itself and neighboring nations. However, recognizing the possibility that too much involvement in the Syrian problem may eventually shake the regime in Saudi Arabia, the country does not seem to take as pronounced action against the Assad regime as it used to.

By contrast, Turkey has enhanced its presence in the Middle East in another respect. It has become a perfect practical model of “post-Islamism” that Egypt and other countries having undergone a regime change should aim for. Based on the policy of separating government and religion since the days of Kemal Atatürk, the Republic of Turkey has followed a unique path for modernization. In Turkey, the Justice and Development Party, an “Islamic” party, won a majority in the parliament in the election in 2007. And this outcome has recently become meaningful in an unexpected way.

However, even Turkey has sources of anxiety associated with the situation in neighboring Syria, including the issues of its refugees and Kurds. On June 22, a Turkish Air Force F4 fighter crashed near the Syrian border, raising a suspicion that Syrian forces shot it down. In fact, these factors are making Turkey no longer remain an onlooker, especially to Syrian issues.

7. U.S. military deployment in Afghanistan

Afghanistan had become the scene of action in the Middle East as a consequence of the 9/11 terror attacks in the U.S. When air strikes launched by U.S. troops soon after those attacks forced the Taliban to flee to Pakistan, the initial expectation was that public peace and order in Afghanistan would easily be restored. However, in March 2003, the Bush administration of the U.S. took up arms against Iraq, focusing the U.S. military deployment in the Middle East on

the front line in Iraq. During this period, the Taliban expanded its presence in Pakistan.

President Obama, who took office in 2009, temporarily allocated the U.S. forces in Iraq to Afghanistan and clearly changed the course so as to end the war in favor of his country's budget expenditure. In Afghanistan, since 2010, the Obama administration has become serious about correcting the U.S. Middle East policy inherited from the former Bush administration and reduced U.S. troops in Iraq while dispatching additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan.

Consequently, the U.S. forces stationed there increased to 95,000 by the end of 2010. Combined with about 36,000 soldiers participating in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from other countries, this brings the total size of foreign forces stationed in Afghanistan to 130,000, which is the largest since the first air strikes against Afghanistan by U.S. and British troops in 2001.

At the same time, under the guidance and training of the U.S. and NATO troops, Afghanistan's armed forces and police have been reinforced rapidly. Setting this project on its way has been expected to facilitate the transfer of security authority to the Afghan government, which is requested by President Karzai. The Obama administration's strategy is to begin the pullout of U.S. troops in July 2011 and complete it by the end of 2014.

Subsequently, President Obama paved the way for the pullout of U.S. and ISAF troops by the end of 2014 by "successfully" accomplishing the operation to kill Bin Laden in a raid in the mid-night on May 1, 2011, in Pakistan's territory. It is said that this operation was executed by a presidential decision while Bin Laden's whereabouts and other information were indefinite. Nevertheless, it eventually justified the pullout from Afghanistan to the American people.

The operation has also worsened U.S. relations with Pakistan, however, and whether security authority can be transferred to Afghanistan as planned remains in question. Before executing the operation to kill Bin Laden, the U.S. did not notify the Pakistani government at all, although it was an essential factor in the success of the operation. This has resulted in the definitive deterioration of the U.S.-Pakistan relations, which are vital to stabilizing the Afghan situation.

In any case, the U.S. government began to pull out its troops from Afghanistan in July 2011. However, suicide attacks and street bombings by Taliban have occurred one after another across Afghanistan, reminding the international community that the nation still has a long way to go before restoring domestic peace. Even many of President Karzai's close associates were among the victims, including his brother Ahmed Wali Karzai, the provincial council chairman for Kandahar, and former President Rabbani, the head of the country's High Peace Council, who were assassinated in July and September respectively.

Since the summer of 2011, the NATO-led ISAF and Afghanistan's troops have jointly strengthened attacks on the Haqqani network, which had entered the country from the southern Pakistani border and led suicide bombings, and achieved some success. In the mean time, there has been wariness among the Afghan people about the growth of the influence of the Taliban for some time. The issue is how to effectively take advantage of these trends to restore domestic order, establish administrative systems, and develop the economy steadily. This is a question that calls for the continuous attention of Japan and other members of the international community to assist in Afghanistan's reconstruction.

Conclusion

The above discussions show that the Middle East, the Arab and the non-Arab regions alike, has been moving into an era of massive structural change since the so-called Arab Spring in 2011. This change, albeit fraught with a risk of

destructive conflict, is signaling the formation of new political entities throughout the region.

This turns the spotlight especially on the growth of the regional roles and significance of major non-Arab countries and Gulf Arab states in the Middle East, such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, that are in the eastern part of the Middle East and have not been substantially affected by the wave of political changes for the moment. In particular, with its influential position on Syria and Afghanistan, Iran will very likely have to constantly engage in diplomatic negotiations to some degree, regardless of the nature of its regime and despite tense relations with its neighbors.

Japan is the only U.S. ally in the Western world that maintains fairly good official diplomatic relations with Iran. If Iran wants to avoid overdependence on Russia and China diplomatically, Japan may have the relatively large potential to contribute to maintaining the stability of political systems across the Middle East. This indicates that Japan should play an active and independent role in helping the Middle East develop with peace and stability and that Japan is in a unique position to do that.

Likewise, in regard to Afghanistan, Japan has gained special trust from the country by eventually becoming the only nation among major Western supporters that did not send troops there. Japan's presence has also been increasing for its continued friendly relations with Iran and Pakistan. Given that the Afghan problem is potentially a major issue in the upcoming U.S. presidential election in November, it is time for Japan to seriously discuss anew how it can actively contribute to the stable development of that country.

So if properly estimated, Japan could be expected to act as a neutral, peaceful and realistic mediator of political powers including governmental, anti-governmental

and international ones in both cases of Iran and Afghanistan. These issues are deeply related to the sustainable peacekeeping system in the Middle East region, and Japan can further contribute to the regional economic prosperity once the construction of its system is accomplished.