

# Peace and Stability in Afghanistan: A Japanese View of the Road Ahead

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*Despite the difficult odds against which the transitional administration in Kabul is struggling, deliberation on adoption of a new constitution comes up in December 2003. The international community, if it works together with Afghans themselves, can go far in helping a new government to emerge in Afghanistan.*

**I**n December 2001 the participants in the U.N. talks on Afghanistan finalized the Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions, the “Bonn Agreement.” During the year and nine months since then (as of September 2003), the process formulated at that time—the “Bonn process”—appears to have gone well. In June 2002, following the timetable, an emergency Loya Jirga (grand council) was convened. It elected Hamid Karzai president of the transitional administration, and he proceeded to form a government. Preparations for convening the Loya Jirga that will approve the Constitution are now underway. The second draft of a national constitution has been submitted to the government after two months of public consultations, and the final draft is expected to be ready for discussion by the Loya Jirga in December this year. An Interim Afghan Election Commission was established in July 2003 and with the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) has started preparations for elections in June 2004.

It may seem, therefore, that events are moving as planned, but a close look at the situation on the ground reveals little reason for optimism about the Bonn process, or the future of Afghanistan. One serious problem is that the central government has not yet succeeded in establishing firm authority outside of Kabul. In the east, southeast, and south regions, there has been a resurgence of terrorist attacks by Taliban infiltrators from Pakistan targeting police and government offices, among others, and the government has been unable to counter them effectively. The north continues to be roiled by periodic armed conflicts between factional armies. Furthermore, very little foreign assistance other than humanitarian aid has reached the local people, especially in the rural areas. In short, while the main events stipulated by the Bonn Agreement may be taking place as planned, the struggle to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan continues, with no end in sight.

Japan has been involved in peace-building in Afghanistan since the mid-1990s. Among other significant efforts, it helped organize and hosted the

International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance for Afghanistan in Tokyo (Tokyo Conference) in January 2002. With the benefit of direct experience in implementing assistance and their nation's continuous engagement in the peace-building process, Japanese, at least those who are working for peace and reconstruction assistance, fully grasp the reality of conditions today and the gap between reality and expectations. In this article I will try to describe the current situation in Afghanistan in terms of the understanding gained by Japanese who have been involved in peace and reconstruction assistance, and then I will suggest measures to be taken by the government of Afghanistan and the international community.

## Japanese Assistance for Peace and Reconstruction

Japan has enjoyed an entirely friendly relationship with Afghanistan since the 1930s. In the 1970s Japan provided development assistance that enabled construction of water supply systems in five major cities, building a tuberculosis center, and enlarging the capacity of Kabul TV. In the 1990s, Japan augmented the humanitarian assistance it provides through UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, and other U.N. agencies. In 1996, Japan announced a proposal for holding an international conference on peace and reconstruction of Afghanistan, and from that time until summer 2001 it worked tirelessly to bring together all the Afghan factions concerned by inviting them to peace talks in Tokyo.

Then came the tragedy of 11 September. Japan declared itself ready to work with other nations to fight terrorism and urged others to do the same. Prime Minister Koizumi sent letters and dispatched high-level special envoys to the heads of state in Islamic countries, including Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, stressing that this fight was not against Islam and encouraging them to join in solidarity against terrorism. The government of Japan took the necessary measures to freeze funds and other financial assets of individuals and entities, most prominently the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and those associated with them, in accordance with UNSCR 1267, 1333, 1373, and 1390. The Japanese Diet passed the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law, which allowed the government to provide logistical support for the coalition forces combating terrorism in Afghanistan and to use the Self-Defense Forces to extend humanitarian aid to Afghan refugees in neighboring countries. The Japanese government made a large financial contribution to the governments of Afghanistan's neighbors, especially Pakistan, to enable them to give support to the international anti-terrorist effort.

In poor countries where terrorist groups had found refuge, however, there was little prospect that the campaign against terrorism would succeed anytime soon. Such countries, exhausted by war and destruction, could not resist the temptation to harbor a group that offered assistance, of whatever kind. The Japanese government was fully aware of those circumstances when it began to consider ways of bringing lasting peace and stability to Afghanistan, where the Taliban

regime had allowed al-Qaeda and its leader Osama Bin Laden to build a base for global terrorist activities. The 1996 proposal for an international conference was intended to address those realities in Afghanistan.

Peace must be built upon reconstruction; reconstruction of the country would support the reconciliation process leading to lasting peace. The U.N. secretary-general appointed Lakdar Brahimi as his special representative for Afghanistan in October 2001 and started to explore possible roads to reconciliation among the Afghan people. While observing and supporting Brahimi's work leading to the Bonn Agreement, Japan, the United States, the EU, and Saudi Arabia started the reconstruction process in Afghanistan by forming the Afghanistan Reconstruction Steering Group (ARSG) in November the same year. The ARSG organized the Tokyo Conference in January 2002, on which occasion over sixty countries from every continent pledged a total of 4.5 billion U.S. dollars for Afghanistan reconstruction. In the meantime, with the establishment of the Afghan Interim Authority on 22 December 2001, the Bonn process was already in motion.

Japan pledged 500 million dollars at the Tokyo Conference. It called for assistance to flow seamlessly from relief to development and set priorities for Japanese aid based on a report by Ogata Sadako, special representative of the prime minister for assistance to Afghanistan, who had visited Afghanistan and two adjacent countries prior to the Tokyo Conference. Developments in Afghanistan, however, exerted pressure on Japan to restructure its assistance strategy. Events in early 2002 indicated the need to establish security to pave the way for reconciliation and reconstruction. By April 2002, the G8 had agreed to assist in improving security and called on its members and UNAMA to take leadership in designated areas. In late April 2002, just before leaving for Afghanistan, Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Yoriko announced a restructured assistance strategy for Afghanistan called "Consolidation of Peace in Afghanistan." In the new strategy, assistance for improvement of the security sector was made one of three main pillars. Foreign Minister Kawaguchi also proposed a "Register for Peace" campaign to promote disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). Together with UNAMA, Japan became a



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co-leader nation for DDR in May 2002. The other two pillars were assistance in the political arena and aid for relief, recovery, and reconstruction.

In political affairs, Japan helped government operations financially and technically. It provided assistance needed to hold the emergency Loya Jirga and aided activities of the Constitution Commission, and it also sent experts to help rebuild the country's TV broadcasting capability. Japan is considering giving further assistance both for the coming elections and the constitutional Loya Jirga.

In relief, recovery, and reconstruction, Japan gave priority to quick and extensive implementation of assistance programs. In February 2002 the Recovery and Employment Afghanistan Programme of UNDP was launched, funded by Japan, and in April the Urgent Rehabilitation Support Programme was begun in Kabul by the Japan International Cooperation Agency. Both programs have been implemented in Kandahar since the summer of 2002.

**Japan has been involved in peace-building in Afghanistan since the mid-1990s.**

In order to extend assistance to local areas, Japan also instituted in July 2002 the "Ogata initiative," a program aimed at filling the gap between relief and development assistance and achieving comprehensive regional development. As of autumn 2003, more than 90 million U.S. dollars has been disbursed to projects under the umbrella of this program, and they are being implemented by international organizations in three regions, Kandahar, Nangarhar, and the northern provinces. Moreover, in September

2002 Japan, Saudi Arabia and the United States announced that they would provide 180 million dollars for assistance in rebuilding the Kabul-Kandahar-Herat road in September 2002. By the end of 2003 it will be possible to drive between Kabul and Kandahar in six or seven hours. In addition, Japan is taking a variety of measures to help finance government activities, education, health and medical care, mass communication, agriculture, landmine removal, and others. For people living in the more remote areas, a large number of small projects, such as rehabilitation of or building schools, clinics, and reservoirs, have been carried out through the Japanese Grass Roots Grant Aid Programme in 19 out of the 32 provinces.

## Features of Afghanistan's Experience

As Japanese assistance grows broader and reaches further, those involved are gaining an increasingly better understanding of the main features of the process unfolding in Afghanistan. First, security is a crucial element in national reconciliation and reconstruction. The Bonn Agreement envisages "the establishment of a broad-based, gender-sensitive, multi-ethnic and fully representative government" that "can be elected through free and fair elections." The ground is being prepared for elections, but there remain some serious security

obstacles. Recent attacks against police stations and local government offices by Taliban insurgents in the southern and southeastern provinces have made it impossible for personnel working on voter registration to enter many districts. Factional armies are still found everywhere in the country. The unceasing struggle among factions as commanders vie to secure their own agendas severely undermines efforts to create an environment conducive to free and fair elections and to establish the rule of law.

The implementation of DDR is expected to dilute the negative influence of the factional armies on the elections and other political processes, and ultimately it will probably rob those local militia of their power. But DDR has not yet left the ground, and even if it starts in October 2003, it is not likely that it will extend throughout the country by the time of the 2004 elections. Apart from the elections, the existence in the south of a sizable group of internally displaced persons who fled ethnic and/or political persecution in the northern and western provinces is one more factor that promises to keep national reconciliation out of reach for some time.

Reconstruction is strongly affected by the security situation. A single casualty in a terrorist attack could stop the delivery of humanitarian assistance. In southern and southeastern Afghanistan, U.N. agencies have cancelled assistance missions to many remote districts. An attack on a road construction base on the Kabul-Kandahar road in Zabul province on the night of 1 September 2003 did not stop the roadwork, but it injured or killed a number of security guards and policemen. If the same kind of incident occurred at a Japanese road construction base, it would almost certainly affect the progress of rebuilding the road. When Japanese assistance is involved in road projects, government officials and construction contractors alike carefully gather security information and intelligence, request security arrangements from the Afghan central and local governments, and try to win the friendship and cooperation of the people living in the area where the work is done.

On the other hand, progress in reconstruction could improve the security situation. In the words of a provincial governor, "Fifty percent of the reason for bad security in the south is neglect of rural areas by the government, and the other 50 percent is Pakistan's willingness to let the Taliban regroup and infiltrate into Afghanistan. If the government succeeds in reconstruction in the rural areas, half of the reason for bad security will disappear and the influence of the Taliban will be reduced to 10 or 20 percent." Moreover, reconstruction could be a way to gather wider support for the government's political goals. Tangible results of the government's reconstruction efforts and assistance from the international community could persuade Afghan people to disassociate themselves from Taliban influence.

Second, the Afghan people are extremely cautious about anything that hints of foreign interference in their internal affairs and wary of foreign influence, whether it affects the nation's decisions or the lives of the people. At the same time they take pride in the history of their resistance against foreign

powers. Ever since the Tokyo Conference, the proprietary role of the Afghan government in reconstruction has been stressed, one result being the creation of the Consultative Group (CG) with the Afghan government as chair.

Japanese assistance is widely welcome and received without hesitation or caution by Afghans. They are confident that Japan has no political ambition in their country, and Japan has no history of interference in their internal politics.

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Press reports, however, argued that Japan did interfere in Afghan internal affairs when the Japanese ambassador stated publicly that a prerequisite for DDR was reform of the Ministry of Defense (MOD), since the MOD would be in charge of disarmament and it needed the trust of the factional armies before they would surrender their weapons. During the constitutional consultations, the international community was asked for technical assistance, but that request was not publicized in order to avoid any perception among the Afghan people of foreign influence in drafting a constitution. In reality, Japanese specialists

presented the Constitutional Commission with the text of the Japanese Constitution and the history of how it took root in Japanese society.

Afghan people seem to understand the need for foreign assistance and welcome it. But interference in internal politics and a visible foreign presence, including armed forces, are sensitive issues. The people of Afghanistan have not forgotten the foreign invasions and political interference of the past, and the terrible toll on innocent people from bombing and strife in recent times is still a vivid memory. Japanese can understand this sentiment on the part of the Afghan people. They, too, experienced an upheaval, beginning with the Meiji Restoration of 1868 and leading to a total restructuring of the country to protect its independence and achieve national prosperity. Fifty-eight years ago they suffered the atomic bomb and then foreign occupation. Japanese are very aware that increased aid will be welcome in Afghanistan, but if international assistance, of whatever kind, seems to imply foreign domination, the Afghan people will become suspicious or even antagonistic, remembering those countries that inflicted damage in their country in the past.

The CG, therefore, has a significant role. The government chairs its meetings and tries to present policy guidelines for each type of aid with the expectation that donors and international implementation agencies will support and follow them.

Third, regardless of Afghan sensitivities about foreign involvement in rebuilding the country, successful national reconciliation and reconstruction will depend heavily on support by the international community. Help will be needed in the security, economic, and political areas.

The first bastion of security in Afghanistan is the coalition forces and the

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The elections scheduled for 2004 may be delayed if international financial assistance comes late. Reforms related to security, including establishment of the Afghan National Army, reconstituting the National Police, judiciary reform, and the Afghanistan New Beginning Program for DDR are all heavily dependent on international assistance. Reconstruction of the major road networks is being financed almost completely by donors and international development banks. Without foreign aid, the reconstruction effort will collapse.

The central government's authority has not been established throughout the country, but the government is moving step by step to extend its reach to all the regions. Among the measures it is taking are introduction of a new integrated currency, tightening control of customs, and appointing governors, police chiefs, and regional military commanders. These actions have not yet met military resistance by the powerful regional leaders. It is thought that the international attention focused on Afghanistan and the visible presence of the international community in the form of UNAMA offices, ISAF, the coalition forces, provincial reconstruction teams, and foreign assistance offices are functioning as a balancing interface between the central government and the regional leaders. In other words, the central government is enjoying silent but visible backing from the international community for its measures to extend its authority to local areas.

Concerning another aspect of international assistance, the international community should implement assistance jointly. The history of Afghanistan has seen many instances of political and military assistance provided unilaterally by a single nation to one specific faction or group. This approach has put obstacles in the way of national reconciliation and integration.

Fourth, peace-building and reconstruction in Afghanistan require virtually a total overhaul and restructure of governmental organizations and social systems as well as establishment of the rule of law throughout the country. As a case in point, a huge number of people are registered as governmental officials and soldiers on the official documents, but neither the central nor local governments have the capacity to execute their own policy. Local disputes over land, water, and drug control, and issues concerning employment, education, medical care and others are not adequately addressed either by local governments or traditional social systems. At the same time military factions, largely pursuing their own agendas, intervene in local politics. There is an urgent need to empower the local governments through capacity building, to establish effective local governance, and to keep military factions out of local politics.

Last but not least, Afghanistan's status quo is fragile. The political, economic, and social rebuilding of the nation is still only partly done and could easily be undone. If the efforts by the government and people of Afghanistan are derailed, and if assistance by the international community fails to continue or increase, the road to lasting peace and stability will be closed. Well aware that drug deals significantly augment the Afghan economy, Minister of Finance

Ashraf Ghani has often said that the future of Afghanistan has several possibilities: it could be a promising country with more than 10 percent annual economic growth, a country controlled by the drug mafia, or an unstable country where the drug mafia are allowed to go their own way.

## Completing the Bonn Process and After

The Bonn process will be completed when a government is established through free and fair elections. According to the Bonn Agreement, the elections are to be held no later than two years from the date of the convening of the emergency Loya Jirga, which means by June 2004. The transitional government of Afghanistan and the UNAMA, which is supervising the Bonn process, are firmly committed to holding them on schedule. What could cause postponement of the elections is delay in preparations, in particular the adoption of an electoral law and the creation of a network of polling stations, due to drawn-out political debate on the process, slow funding, security obstacles, and other, technical factors. There is a chance that the elections will be put off beyond the summer of 2004.

On the other hand, none of the leaders in Afghanistan's political theater is opposed to holding the elections and establishing a fully representative government. Indeed, the probability of establishing a government through elections seems to be high. The questions are how free and fair the elections will be; how "broad-based, gender-sensitive, and multi-ethnic" the future government will be; and if a fully representative government does emerge, what direction it will take and how it will shape the future of Afghanistan itself.

How free and fair the elections will be largely depends on security and the political situation. The report by the United Nations secretary-general dated 23 July 2003 says, "Without the appropriate security environment, communities in some areas of the country are bound to be disenfranchised. Without the appropriate political environment, the process will not be free and could easily be diverted to serve the interests of a narrow range of factional interests as opposed to the interests of the country as a whole." The secretary-general's concerns come out of the deteriorating security situation caused by the escalated attacks by the Taliban in the south and southeast, and from the continuing existence of factional armies, caused partly by delay in implementing DDR—of which one aim is to disband those local armies. To improve the present security situation, the transitional government and the international community need to take much stronger measures to clamp down on the Taliban and push them out. They must get a pilot program for DDR started soon and ensure that DDR has been fully carried out in the major population centers by summer of 2004. As one of the provincial governors has pointed out, besides taking on the Taliban in armed battles, rural rehabilitation and development are potent weapons against terrorism and insurgency and should be given high priority. It is all the more urgent, therefore, that the international community augment assistance to the rural areas in those provinces.

How broadly representative Afghanistan's new government will be, and whether or not a fully representative government will actually come into being, will become clearer from the substance of the constitution that is approved by the constitutional Loya Jirga and from the political situation that prevails after the Loya Jirga. On 30 August 2003, the union of the clergy passed and announced a resolution insisting on a constitution that adhered 100 percent to the tenets of Islam. The organization opposed use of the word democracy, and it opposed any stipulations giving equal rights to men and women. It called for a ban on all non-Muslim political parties and on Christian activities.

One person who has contacts in the Constitutional Commission has said that "democracy" and provisions for gender equality and freedom of religion are incorporated into the second draft constitution, while Islam is recognized as the state religion. It appears, moreover, that some political figures and groups have started to wrangle over the share in the political pie that they can wrest from the system that the constitution, in its present form, promises to put in place. They can be counted on to continue wrangling through higher-level discussions. The constitutional Loya Jirga is scheduled for December 2003.

Despite concerns about the outcome of wrangling over the constitutional process, it is extremely important for the success of the Bonn process that the Loya Jirga adopt a constitution at this particular time. If a constitution is approved by December, the Bonn process will be moving on schedule. Hence it is vital that the international community encourage and help Afghans to achieve this objective.

Whether or not a broad-based, gender-sensitive, multi-ethnic, and fully representative government is realized or not will remain unanswered even after a constitution is adopted. If the constitution adopted by the Loya Jirga retains the principles contained in the second draft, that will help to prepare the ground for establishing after the elections a government of the type anticipated by the Bonn Agreement. Still, both the transitional and elected governments will most certainly face opposition from religious and other groups that are not satisfied with the constitution. For this reason also, it will be important for other nations to give their support, helping the Afghans to keep on track of the Bonn process and encouraging them to make the establishment of a government their first priority. If the Loya Jirga adopts a constitution that favors the clergy and traditional values, the new government may be constricted and unable to respond to the needs and circumstances of the international community in making national policy. Even so, the international community should support the Afghans as they set up their own legitimate gov-

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ernment, respecting their traditions and values and encouraging them to become an active member of global society. Cooperation and solidarity with the international community will help Afghans adjust their internal system and society to international standards.

All things considered, a constitutional government will not be as strong as it could be if it is besieged by opposition. Judging from the present political, economic, and social circumstances, the Afghan government is bound to run into difficulties in fighting terrorism and establishing law and order; in reconstruction and development efforts, especially in the rural areas; and in dealing with the opponents of modernization, especially on issues of gender equality and education. Precisely because these difficulties promise to be serious, the international community is strongly urged to continue and increase assistance to Afghanistan. No nation should act in ways that could be construed as intervention in Afghanistan's internal politics. Rather, other nations should build up an external environment that will help the government in Kabul tackle foreign and domestic political issues effectively. Concerted action by the international community should be encouraged. And most important, every country should be prohibited from giving direct or indirect support to any Afghan faction, party, or group, whether in the form of money, weapons, or anything else.

In cooperation with the Afghan government, the international community should create a watchdog mechanism to spot such support when it emerges. It hardly needs stating that other nations should also augment their assistance for economic reconstruction as well as improved security. If the government's authority is to extend to every corner of the country, the rule of law must be established. And that means reforms in the security system, including building up the Afghan National Army, reconstituting a national police force, judiciary reform, and pursuing DDR. Drug control should be stepped up; it should be the responsibility not only of security-related but also of reconstruction agencies. Those agencies should help introduce viable alternative occupations, and assist people to adopt them successfully. Economic reconstruction and development will be the key to strengthening the government position and stabilizing the politics. This is the time for international society to consider and formulate a strategy for assistance to Afghanistan in the post-Bonn Agreement era.

## The Next Moves: A Japanese View

Here I summarize my personal suggestions for actions that will move Afghanistan further toward achieving lasting peace and stability.

1. Take joint action: Joint action is crucial to the success of any measure. Joint action is acting together, whether among the Afghan people, between Afghanistan and the international community, or among the nations of the world. It can be a powerful mode of implementing any procedure that serves peace-building and reconstruction. By acting together, the Afghan

people could be encouraged to overcome differences and to move forward toward integration; they could develop solidarity for common purposes, especially the fight against terrorism; and they could achieve mutual understanding and respect as a nation among others. Through joint action, they could avoid the political and security problems caused by domestic interference by a foreign country and the antagonism generated when another country is seen as trying to exert control. Finally, joint action will only strengthen peace-building efforts by the Afghan people.

2. Commit to peace and stability: Now that we are halfway to the goal, Afghanistan and the international community should redouble their efforts to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan in all sectors of domestic politics, security, and reconstruction.
3. Let the constitution take root: The people and government of Afghanistan are urged to do everything in their power to let the new constitution sink roots into their society. Afghan society has its own characteristics that differ from other societies. Other nations together, respecting the values Afghan society has nurtured over thousands of years, should help the people and government of Afghanistan adjust their constitution to the values of their society.
4. Achieve national reconciliation: The government and people of Afghanistan should not let up in working for national reconciliation. The fight against terrorism must never become an instrument to exclude any Afghan nationals. It is always wise and ultimately more beneficial to leave room for discussion with the opposition. At the same time, the authority and effectiveness of the government need to be enhanced. The international community should be ready to assist in this wherever it can.
5. Insure security: New or revised international security arrangements should be established for the stability of the relationship between Afghanistan and neighbouring countries based on the declaration made in December 2002. Specifically, the United Nations, G8 countries, European Union, and NATO—which have taken responsibility for improvement of security and security reform in Afghanistan—together with Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries, should create a forum to monitor the political and security situation of the region. Furthermore, as the situation requires in the post-Bonn process era, the U.N. Security Council should be ready to give another mandate to the ISAF. And the coalition forces in Afghanistan should gain endorsement from the new government.
6. Implement national development: The national development program set up by the transitional government should be reviewed and followed after the new government is established. In my view, however, rural rehabilitation and development, infrastructure development, and building up a national system in every sector should be more focused in the first stage. Education, health and medical care, and agriculture need thoroughgoing reform in rural areas. Despite the many improvements that are necessary, it is hoped that the

new government will create a new national development program based on the previous one in cooperation with the international community by working through the present Consultative Group process.

About this Article

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