

REGIONAL POLITICS

**COOPERATION BETWEEN JAPAN
AND AMERICA IN CENTRAL ASIA:
NEW OUTLINES
OF GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP**

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In the 21st century the geopolitical configuration of forces in Central Asia acquired new outlines: the United States, the only world's leader able to extend its influence worldwide, created a network of military bases in Central Asia and built up strategic alliances there. American presence is a fact and a political reality caused by the Soviet Union's disintegration and the weakening of Russia's foothold in the region.

Washington's consistent policies designed to involve the local countries in its sphere of influence have produced tangible results and demonstrated that America wants to and can dominate the world. A more or less in-depth investigation of the causes and specific features of U.S. policies in Central Asia, as well as of Russia's efforts to stem America's influence in a region that is still a sphere of its traditional interests is beyond the scope of the present article. The role of Japan, the oldest and the most loyal American ally, in the Central Asian context is especially interesting. The country helped the United States to penetrate Central Asia and establish control over the strategically key areas.

Even though Japan is pursuing numerous goals in the region, its Central Asian policy can be divided into periods within the world and regional contexts—an effort which reveals that Tokyo's foreign policy initiatives are connected with the crucial political events in Central Asia.

Until 1996 neither Japanese nor American policies betrayed any serious strategic interconnections, since the Western countries were unanimous in their "desire" to help the post-Soviet independent states. Even though financial support on a bilateral basis and within international structures (the IMF, WB, IBRD, etc.), as well as the efforts to establish military, political, and economic contacts to obtain guarantees of nuclear security and nuclear non-proliferation were collective efforts, they cannot be described as pool-

ing efforts for the sake of any strategic goal. And not because there was no such goal, rather there was no clear idea of the desired results.

The year 1996, with several interconnected events, was the starting point for radical changes in the regional balance of power. In September the Taliban moved to the east of Afghanistan and occupied its provinces (Nangarhar, Kunar and Lagman) and the capital city of Kabul.¹ This and Ahmad shah Masoud's retreat aroused concern in many countries. The neighbors, and the world as a whole for that matter, were afraid, with good reason, that the Taliban would spread its influence to the predominantly Muslim population of Central Asia. We can assume that the threat had been obvious long before the Taliban established its control over 90 percent of the country's territory.

China's growing influence in regional and world politics was another factor that greatly affected the situation in Central Asia. In fact, an analysis of the interdependence between the APR and Central Asia in the context of globalization can help to assess the American and Japanese policies in the region. Central Asia and the APR, two areas geographically distant from each other, are tied together by China, their common neighbor, which has gained political weight thanks to its ever growing military and economic potential.

The prospect for China turning into a powerful regional and, probably, global power, have been actively discussed in the U.S., Japan, and elsewhere. There was the opinion that China's high development rates would make it the main American rival in the APR and Southeast Asia. A closer union between Japan and the United States looked less expedient since, many analysts believed, Tokyo would seek closer cooperation with Beijing.² In fact, the two countries drew much closer in order to counterweigh China. This became especially evident after the latter's tough statements about its territorial claims to certain islands and its demonstration of force in 1996 to intimidate Taiwan on the eve of the presidential elections.³

On 17 April, 1996 the two countries signed a joint declaration in Tokyo on a security alliance for the 21st century, which confirmed that their military alliance remained an important instrument of Japan's security and that it fully meets the U.S.'s new strategic goals in East Asia.⁴ In 1997, the sides revised the key principles of their bilateral defense cooperation. The document contained an extended interpretation of the sphere covered by the 1961 Japanese-American security treaty under which Tokyo pledged itself to support Washington if threats developed around Japanese territory (Art 5 of the revised principles).⁵

Without going into details of a defensive and military nature, we can say that, "The military alliance with Japan provided the United States with more opportunity to use Japanese economic and military potential in America's global and regional interests aimed at containing China and Russia under the new historical conditions."⁶ The treaty is mainly aimed at China, even if Russia, though weaker than before, can still compete with the U.S. and Japan in the region. Washington and Tokyo have demonstrated their firm resolution to stand opposed to Beijing in the APR.

China in turn expressed its concern with the developments in Afghanistan, since they could spread radical Islamist sentiments to the Muslim population of the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region. Similar threats to Central Asian security (terrorism, separatism, religious extremism, etc.) called for joint coordinated efforts, therefore China launched a stage-by-stage long-term project to set up a security belt along its borders. On 26 April, 1996 the leaders of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan signed an Agreement in Shanghai on Confidence-Building Measures in the Military Sphere in the Border

¹ See: A.A. Kniazev, *Istoria Afghanskoy voyny 1990-kh gg. i prevrashchenie Afghanistana v istochnik ugroz dlia Tsentral'noy Azii*, Bishkek, 2001, p. 56.

² See: S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, New York, 1996.

³ See: N.P. Dmitrievskaia, "Iapono-amerikanskiy dogovor bezopasnosti: novye tendentsii i politicheskoe vzaimodeystvie," in: *Iaponia i problemy bezopasnosti v ATR*, Moscow, 1996, p. 129.

⁴ See: M.I. Krupianko, *Iaponia posle "kholodnoy voyny."* *Politika obespechenia natsional'noy bezopasnosti*, Moscow, 2001, p. 113.

⁵ See: G.D. Hook, J. Gilson, C.W. Hughes, H. Dobson, *Japan's International Relations. Politics, Economics and Security*, London, New York, 2000, p. 141.

⁶ M.I. Krupianko, op. cit., p. 113.

Areas; in 1997, the sides signed an Agreement in Moscow on the Mutual Reduction of Military Forces along the Border. These documents started a permanent consultative multisided mechanism later called the Shanghai Five.⁷

Together with consultations on setting up zones of predictability and transparency, the organization discusses numerous other issues: international terrorism; illicit drug trafficking, smuggling of weapons and illegal migrants, and other forms of transborder crime. Many countries, primarily the United States, were undoubtedly worried by China's much greater regional involvement, especially when it came to urgent regional and other international issues, as well as by the situation in Afghanistan.

The United States had not only to contain China in the APR, it had to counterbalance China's activities in Central Asia as well. It seems that the mechanism for allied cooperation with Japan—the largest donor of the Central Asian countries since 1994—came in handy. On 24 July, 1997 Premier Ryutaro Hashimoto formulated his Eurasian diplomacy; later there appeared the Silk Road Diplomacy of Keizo Obuchi designed to add vigor to Japan's cooperation with Central Asia, within which Japan started contributing to the modernization and building of a transportation network. It funded prospecting for oil and gas in the Caspian and became involved in extraction projects. All this looked natural within the Great Silk Road initiative expected to connect the West and the East. The hopes of the oil- and gas-rich Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, in the first place) fell flat: Middle Eastern oil dominated the world market. Transportation of Central Asian energy fuels required investments on a large scale, while the situation remained as volatile as ever. Obviously the Silk Road had no future, yet Japan continued its funding on a smaller scale within the Official Development Assistance (ODA) program and on a wider scale through other institutions to balance out the size of its aid.

Meanwhile, the Shanghai Five was developing; its range of declared goals increased, and the frequency of its summits showed that the organization had come to stay and that it was building up its regional authority. Unable to directly affect the Shanghai process, Washington had to turn to Uzbekistan, which remained outside the Five. In fact, Islam Karimov's implacable position in relation to Russia was taken into account. Tashkent was obviously dead set against Moscow's greater regional involvement. It blocked Russia's regional initiatives and in 1999 withdrew from the Collective Security Treaty, under the pretext of its complete impotence, and treated closer relations with Moscow with a great deal of skepticism. The latter, being aware that control over Tashkent was slipping away, nurtured the idea of involving it in the Shanghai process.

Because of its geographic location, Uzbekistan is the only double land-locked country in the world: to reach external markets it has to cross the territories of several neighbors. It is too far removed from the Caspian to be attractive for foreign investments. Aware of its faults, Uzbekistan placed its stakes on the United States as the only power capable of realizing its interests in any place on the globe. As Brzezinski put it, "America is too distant to be dominant in this part of Eurasia, but too powerful not to be engaged."⁸

On the other hand, Uzbekistan has oil and gas of its own and controls a network of regional gas pipelines inherited from Soviet times. It has the largest and the strongest army in Central Asia; since 1994 Uzbekistan, together with its neighbors, has been actively involved in the NATO-sponsored Partnership for Peace and other NATO programs carried out in certain countries. The Afghan border was another important factor bringing Tashkent and Washington closer together, yet prior to the 9/11 events the U.S. could not openly support Uzbekistan because of human rights violations there—otherwise American policy designed to support democracy worldwide would have contradicted American priorities. Had information about American funding of an undemocratic regime reached the world media, the White House would

⁷ See: D. Trofimov, "Shanghai Process: From the 'Five' to the Cooperation Organization. Summing Up the 1990s and Looking Ahead," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2 (14), 2002, p. 86.

⁸ Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, New York, 1997, p. 148.

have had to wrestle with the unpleasant consequences. Not daring to openly support Uzbekistan late in 1995, the White House extended its “secret” support in the form of a stabilization loan of about \$1.5 billion given by the U.S.-controlled WB and IMF.

Japan, a loyal American ally, that prefers to ignore the human rights issues, became one of the largest monetary donors of Uzbekistan, despite its unfavorable geostrategic location. By 2001 the total sum of Japanese investments in the oil and gas industry and transportation infrastructure (railways, construction and modernization of highways and airports) topped \$1.6 billion⁹; its humanitarian and gratuitous aid within the ODA program reached \$200m.¹⁰ Because of Japan’s insufficient control over the use of these funds, the aid is spent on absolutely different purposes. The Great Silk Road idea aside, stability and continued loyalty of Karimov’s regime to the U.S. must be paid for: this is vividly demonstrated by the internal opposition and the rising popular discontent over the worsening socioeconomic situation. As a result radical religious feelings are spreading among the local Muslims: in 1999 Tashkent was the scene of several terrorist acts, while the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan stepped up its activities. Under these conditions close cooperation with the United States was the only option. It seems that the quoted figures of Japanese aid may point to secret diplomatic designs of involving Uzbekistan in the so-called “club of U.S. friends.” There is no direct proof of this and the role of Japan in these designs is not quite clear, yet the allied relations between the U.S. and Japan suggest that they share interests in Central Asia.

Supported by Japan and the United States Uzbekistan could no longer shy away from the Shanghai process: on 15 June, 2001 it officially joined this structure at the Shanghai summit; as a result the Five became the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Washington finally acquired the indirect opportunity to become involved in the Shanghai process and influence it to a certain extent, through Uzbekistan. The guess that America and Japan are resolved to balance China’s influence in two directions has been indirectly confirmed once more.

In the wake of the 9/11 events the White House officially recognized that Tashkent should receive financial aid and asked Tokyo for cooperation, since it was expected that “Uzbekistan will play the key role in the military campaign against neighboring Afghanistan.”¹¹ It became clear that it was thanks to the Japanese efforts that Uzbekistan remained loyal to the United States, a circumstance which made it possible to set up an American base in Khanabad within the framework of the declared war on terror. The military operation allowed Washington to strengthen its position in the region. In March 2002, the U.S. and Uzbekistan signed the Declaration on the Establishment of Strategic Partnership,¹² a document which gave new impulse to their bilateral relations. Today, the United States officially extends annual aid of \$161m to Uzbekistan.¹³

In July 2002, Japan (probably under American pressure) signed an identical agreement with Uzbekistan to further strengthen special political relations. To step up its economic aid to Uzbekistan, Japan signed an agreement on further economic cooperation and promotion of economic reforms in the republic. (It should be added that Uzbekistan is the only Central Asian country with a separate agreement on economic cooperation with Japan.)

The U.S. strategic presence in the region is extended to another important sector: a military base in Kyrgyzstan (at the Manas international airport). In 1996 Japan gave the first grant of \$5m for its modernization; in 2000 the second stage of modernization was concluded: the take-off runway for heavy planes was widened; the airport acquired state-of-the-art freight terminals; radars were replaced, etc. On the whole, about \$50m were allocated for these purposes.¹⁴ Today, Manas is one of the best-equipped airports in Central Asia and meets all contemporary requirements.

⁹ *Vremia MN*, No. 980, 31 July, 2002.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Asahi shinbun*, 29 October, 2001.

¹² See: F. Tolipov, “Are the Heartland and Rimland Changing in the Wake of the Operation in Afghanistan?” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 5 (23), 2003, p. 101.

¹³ See: *Obshchestvenniy reyting*, 19 January, 2004.

¹⁴ See: *Vecherniy Bishkek*, 12 October, 2003.

During the military operation the airport was one of the key points from which military cargoes and personnel of the coalition forces were dispatched to Afghanistan and from which military aircraft took off. As the military operation drew to an end, some of the foreign troops deployed in Central Asia were sent back to places of their permanent dislocation in France, Italy, Germany, Korea, etc. The United States preserved its military presence, extended its military bases by spreading to adjacent territories rented from Kyrgyzstan. The U.S. Gansi base is serving two strategic areas—Afghanistan and China—thus making the Japanese and American efforts to contain China in Central Asia more and more obvious. To confirm this observation let me revise the recent events within the SCO and Uzbekistan's role in this organization.

Many analysts have already pointed out that Uzbekistan's role is a destructive one: the republic is exploiting the Russian-Chinese and Russian-Central Asian contradictions to boost its regional status.¹⁵ This opinion is obviously justified, yet it ignores another important factor, that is, America's role as an instigator. Official Tashkent does want regional domination—by the same token America will be placed in the driving seat. In other words, Uzbekistan's key status in U.S. global strategy is nothing more than the “implementation of America's conception for the pivotal countries.”¹⁶ Being aware of the scope of problems, Russia has already confronted the United States with its own military presence within the Collective Security Treaty by opening a military base in Kant (Kyrgyzstan). In an effort to downplay the importance of Kyrgyzstan created by the rivals' military presence on its territory, Moscow made the mistake of opening a SCO Antiterrorist Center in Tashkent (rather than setting it up in Bishkek as planned). This amazed both the Chinese and the Kyrgyz delegations at the Moscow SCO summit in May 2003. Russia obviously wanted to tie Tashkent closer to the SCO in order to diminish its destructive impact, but by transferring this important SCO structure to Uzbekistan, the U.S.'s strategic ally in the region, Russia may get the opposite result. Washington will increase its influence, while Tashkent will be able to realize its claims to regional leadership. Its relations with Beijing have already been spoilt by mutual mistrust, which the Chinese identify with Tashkent's ambitious and inconsistent steps.¹⁷

The future of the region and the position of the U.S., Japan, Russia, and China on the international scene will depend on their rivalry in Central Asia caused by the intricate intertwining of their interests in the region.

My opinions may help to create a different idea about the current foreign policy trends in Japan and reveal new prospects for U.S.-Japan global cooperation.

After 12 years of Japanese presence in the region we can finally estimate the scope of Tokyo and Washington's post-Soviet strategic plan in Central Asia, which appeared long before the Americans came to Central Asia. Clearly, the United States was not satisfied with the format of its relations with Japan, which proved its stability and viability during the Cold War. The 1991 Storm in the Desert, \$13 billion Japan extended to the anti-Iraqi coalition and inadequate media coverage of Japan's role in this operation revealed Tokyo's true international role: “a political midget with a large purse.”¹⁸ This revived the slogans popular among the Japanese politicians and academics in the 1960s about the need to harmonize Japan's international and economic might.¹⁹

The situation in the world and resolution Tokyo has demonstrated when pursuing this aim seemed to confirm its intention to boost its international importance. First, Tokyo must extend its involvement in the U.N. peacekeeping operations. In June 1992, the country adopted a Law on International Cooperation and Peacekeeping, which sanctioned Japan's military involvement in the U.N. operations. As a result, between 1992 and 1996 Japan participated in peacekeeping operations in Cambodia, Mozambique, Zaire,

¹⁵ See: D. Trofimov, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹⁶ See: F. Tolipov, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

¹⁷ See: S.G. Luzianin, “Kitay, Rossia i Tsentral'naia Azia,” *Kitay v mirovoy politike*, Moscow, 2001, p. 331.

¹⁸ V.O. Kistanov, “Vneshniaia politika Iaponii na rubezhe vekov,” in: *Iaponia: konets XX veka. Poslednie tendentsii transformatsii*, Moscow, 1996, p. 131.

¹⁹ See: *Ibidem*.

the Golan Heights, and Kenya.²⁰ There is a discussion going on in the country about possible constitutional amendments.

Washington urged Tokyo to assume even wider responsibilities outside its military involvement in the adjacent areas within the Security Treaty amended in 1996: America wanted military-political support of its initiatives within the U.N. and military and other cooperation in third countries.²¹ Tokyo's active financial involvement in Central Asia is a vivid confirmation of the above, yet there too, like in the Gulf War, Japan was an obedient subordinate, which in fact paid for America's future presence in the region, created a toehold for its future expansion, and used its economic and political instruments to buy the loyalty of certain Central Asian states.

The U.S. and Japanese joint policies in Central Asia are determined by their interest in the local energy fuels and their transportation routes, which, in the long-term perspective, will make it possible to stop buying oil in the Middle East: the United States is ensuring security while Japan is responsible for financial control.

If we take into account that they started making strides into the region in 1996 or even earlier, we have to ask: since Washington was working toward its military presence in the region prior to 9/11, could the U.S. and Japan have known in advance about the tragic events (or could they have even be involved in them)? I can offer no opinion on the issue and I am not going to discuss it here. One thing is clear though: both countries contemplated the possibility of similar events which would have called for military or other American interference in Central Asia.

Here is another side of the same issue: it is becoming clear that the U.S. and Japan are entering the 21st century as partners in the global domination project and as the most developed and richest states in the world. It seems that Japan will not remain forever limited by its constitution, which so far does not allow it to become a large military power in this partnership.

The so-called "antiterrorist packet" adopted in Japan on 29 October, 2001 is the first step in the right direction. It contains the Law on Special Antiterrorist Measures and amendments to the Law on Self-Defense Forces and to the Law on Marine Security.²² These documents have considerably widened the functions of the self-defense forces and allowed them to offer logistic support to U.S. troops (with the exception of deliveries of weapons and ammunition) and to protect the U.S. military bases in Japan and along the coasts with the right to open fire on all border-violating vessels. The Japanese military cannot participate in military operations and move military equipment across foreign territories. The law is limited to 24 months and can be extended by the same period.²³ Even though the packet is a temporary one it has created a precedent of bypassing certain constitutional restrictions: involvement in multinational operations is interpreted as the right to collective security banned under the Japanese constitution.

This shows that Tokyo is gradually fulfilling Washington's recommendations that Japan have a greater military share in their alliance. Time will show whether these efforts prove successful and effective. We should not ignore, however, the international response to the process: China and North Korea are rather nervous about Japan's militarization. The current instability in the APR leaves Japan no other option—it has to strengthen its cooperation with the United States.

Japan looks at its Central Asian involvement as one of the key factors in its changing role on the world scene. Its allied relations with the United States will inevitably strengthen and they will determine its place and role in international relations.

It seems that this is a compromise between Japan's desire to balance its political status and its second place in world economy with its awareness that the U.S. is instrumental in ensuring Japan's security and protecting its economic interests all over the world.

²⁰ See: M. Nosov, "Iaponia i mirovtvorcheskaia deiatel'nost OON," in: *Iaponia i global'nye problemy chelovechestva*, Moscow, 1999, p. 267.

²¹ See: *Ibid.*, p. 276.

²² See: O.A. Dobrinskaia, "O podkhode Iaponii k bor'be s mezhdunarodnym terrorizmom," in: *Iaponia 2002-2003*, A Yearbook, Moscow, 2003, p. 91.

²³ *Ibidem*.

At the same time, the two countries' strategic plans for changing the geopolitical balance of power in Central Asia cannot be described as a success. It has proven much easier to come to the region than it has to retain control over it: neither the strategic partnership with Uzbekistan, nor American military presence in Afghanistan guarantee Central Asian stability. In the next decade the grandiose plans to transport Caspian energy fuels along the eastern route will remain unrealized, which means that the prospects for prosperity in the region and its oil- and gas-rich countries remain vague. The Russian and Chinese routes are the safest ones; Beijing and Moscow are in a more favorable position and, in principle, have all the means for implementing these projects.

The agreement on the delivery of Turkmenian gas to Russia is one of the most vivid examples; its negatives aspects aside (Moscow has left huge numbers of Russian-speakers in Turkmenistan, cruelly persecuted by the authorities, to the mercy of Ashghabad), the agreement is a successful one. It became possible because of the continued instability in Afghanistan, which prevents gas deliveries from Turkmenistan to Pakistan. Iran, an oil-rich country, does not need Turkmenian gas. In addition, it is impossible to attract investments for transporting energy resources via Iran because of an imminent U.S. blockade. Other alternatives are too expensive—under present conditions funding cannot be guaranteed. In a certain sense the U.S. and other countries have pushed Turkmenistan into Russia's embrace.

China has its own ideas about the future of fuel transportation—it plans to export energy fuels from Kazakhstan. The plans have not yet been realized, but the growing economic potential of the People's Republic of China makes their realization a possibility.