



## **The United States and Japan Should Aim for a Strategic Complementary Partnership in Afghanistan: Search for a Proactive Division of Labor**

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This paper was first presented at a one-day bilateral workshop on April 29, 2011, held in conjunction with the Osaka School of International Public Policy (OSIPP) in Washington, D.C. In the papers, authors aim to assess each government's "whole-of-government" or interagency coordination of peacebuilding policies and to identify priorities, assets, and expertise as applied to Afghanistan and Sudan. The goal of the project is to explore the strengths and weaknesses of both the United States and Japan's respective initiatives with an eye toward how the two allies can best cooperate and work synergistically in a "whole of alliance" approach to peacebuilding operations in vulnerable or failing states.

### ***Introduction***

From a viewpoint of advocating effective U.S.-Japan cooperation in the peacebuilding process in Afghanistan, the two countries should aim for a strategic complementary partnership. This does not mean that both countries are going to work together by doing exactly the same thing. Rather, Japan should complement American efforts by becoming actively involved in the areas where Japan has a comparative advantage and the United States has had little involvement. Indeed, a search for a complementary combination of the efforts by the two countries would be the most effective and realistic option.

### ***Division of Labor under a Common Strategic Goal***

The problem of Afghanistan is complex and has multiple intertwining factors. Each challenge needs different activities at different times. Some challenges require prompt action and quick results, whereas others might need longer-term perspectives and commitments. Some will require military responses whereas others need humanitarian assistance and development aid. Indeed, it can be argued that military units, aid workers, humanitarian agencies, NGOs,

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diplomats, and other actors in Afghanistan have already been working in a complementary manner in one way or another. This paper does not deny that such cooperative relationships have already occasionally developed spontaneously in the field. At the same time, however, it seeks to advocate for a more coordinated or shaped complementarity, as a complex situation on the ground requires more systematic approaches.

In order to find a complementary combination of different approaches that can indeed bring better outcomes, it is imperative that the United States and Japan share a common strategic goal. Under a common strategic understanding, the two countries can examine their positions and comparative strengths, and search for a harmonious and complementary division of labor. Of course, different combinations should be sought according to the different nature of the challenges they face in Afghanistan.

Hence, instead of seeking a way to work in the same area where the United States has already been active, Japan should concentrate its efforts on the areas and issues where the United States does not have a comparative advantage, has not paid sufficient attention, or should avoid being involved in, so that Japan can demonstrate its full potential as an alliance partner of the United States.

Of course, a division of labor has already been sought, in substance, between the United States and Japan. However, such a division of labor was sought as a result of passive and negative understanding of the role of Japan in the security dimension. Japan has a number of domestic challenges, legal constraints, and its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) have not been designed to be active in overseas operations. Hence, there is a limit to the extent to which Japan can actually choose to be active in global security management. This is why the United States and Japan have to look to a division of labor in which Japan will assist the United States in non-military activities such as financial contribution and development aid.

This paper, however, does not advocate such a conventional division of labor, but it seeks to promote a more proactive division of labor between the United States and Japan. In this approach, Japan will not seek to serve as a United States-lite, but rather it should be recognized as an irreplaceable partner of the United States in the context of peacebuilding in Afghanistan.

While Japan's efforts should be placed within the same strategic framework, its activities should be separated from the counterinsurgency efforts led by the United States and NATO, which aim to urge anti-government elements in Afghanistan to support the government side. Japan's efforts should be poured into areas where they have a better chance of being successful models of "post-conflict" reconstruction, and the people on the ground can appreciate the peace dividends. At first glance, such an approach can be seen as irrelevant to ongoing efforts by the United States and its NATO allies. Nonetheless, if Japan's efforts are to be coordinated strategically with the United States and NATO, it can serve as a good complementary approach to existing ones.

Thus, maintaining a policy that can be seen as having “strategic distance” from that of the United States can be a way for Japan to contribute to the ongoing efforts of the United States in Afghanistan. Japan does not have to be involved in every single American operation. It does not necessarily have to work together with the United States side-by-side all the time as long as Japan’s approach is firmly based on broader U.S.-Japan cooperation. Each country should play a certain and different role based on its relationship with the country concerned. For instance, if Japan wants to act as an effective mediator between anti-government elements, such as the Taliban, and the incumbent government, Japan might be better off not being closely involved in the U.S. counterinsurgency operations on the ground.

### ***Review of Japan’s Contribution to Peacebuilding in Afghanistan: DDR and DIAG***

So far, Japan has contributed to the security aspect of the peacebuilding process in Afghanistan in two major programs: disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of the ex-combatants and disbandment of illegal armed groups (DIAG). DDR was attempted as a part of a larger effort towards security sector reform, which was led by the G8, while DIAG was launched as a successor program to DDR. In the DDR program, the Japanese government worked with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). In the DIAG program, it worked with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Afghanistan.

Unless they are carried out within the wider strategic framework for peacebuilding in Afghanistan, these two programs can undermine the overall peacebuilding objective. One can argue that since Japan has not dispatched any military contingent to Afghanistan, and has thus won a certain trust of the government as well as of the Afghan people, Japan had a strategic advantage in pursuing the implementation of difficult tasks such as DDR and DIAG. Nevertheless, these endeavors are closely linked to security management and cannot be indifferent to other security operations such as security sector reform and counterinsurgency undertaken in Afghanistan.

Because Japan has not contributed its military contingent to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), it has limited access to the strategic and operational decision-making process of ISAF. At the same time, as Japan did not dispatch its armed forces to Afghanistan, and because of its unique commitment to the reconstruction of Afghanistan, Japan was able to fulfill a special role that no one else could have played in the implementation of DDR. That being said, however, without the presence of U.S. and/or NATO forces on the ground, it might have not been possible for Japan to persuade recalcitrant warlords to disarm their troops. Moreover, without the emergence of favorable conditions, which was generated by other political and security endeavors, the DDR program could not have been completed no matter how strenuously Japan had devoted its efforts to that end.

It is fair to say that the DDR program carried out by Japan together with UNAMA was “completed,” and achieved some of the desired objectives with help from the United States,

Canada, and other troop-contributing countries. At least, the completion of the DDR program provided a ceremonial moment in the reconstruction process of Afghanistan, which served to symbolize a new beginning.

In this context, Japan was able to collaborate with relevant security actors on the ground when it engaged in DDR. Nevertheless, such collaboration was limited to the tactical level, and collaboration at the strategic level did not materialize. For example, the coordination between the DDR program and other critical aspects of security sector reform such as the reform of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP) remained insufficient. Furthermore, it seems that the DDR program has never seriously been coordinated with the U.S.-led counterterrorism operation called Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

As a result, the unilateral completion of the DDR program, in the situation where other relevant programs were seriously delayed, created a so-called security vacuum and allowed the warlords to retain their influence over the central government. In short, DDR was not successful although the DDR program was completed. It left a negative legacy to the overall peacebuilding process in Afghanistan.

Japan has worked with the UNDP in the DIAG program, which was considered to be a follow-on program of DDR. DIAG was launched without favorable conditions. Of course, it is difficult to say that the DIAG program was a total failure as it was able to facilitate the disbandment of 743 groups out of about 2,000 illegal armed groups existing in Afghanistan between 2005 and 2010. Nonetheless, unless it is effectively placed in the overall strategy, and conducted in conjunction with other reconciliation/reintegration initiatives and counterinsurgency activities, the DIAG program is doomed to failure. In other words, tactical gain in DIAG will not lead to strategic achievements if it is conducted without close coordination with other relevant endeavors.

### ***A Key Area for U.S.-Japan Cooperation: The Afghan National Police***

In preparation for the withdrawal of their troops from Afghanistan, the United States and NATO now seek to facilitate the transition of security responsibility to the Afghan authority. The United States and NATO seem to consider such a transition to be their utmost priority in the peacebuilding process in Afghanistan. Thus, in order to establish a complementary and cooperative relationship with the United States, Japan will have to design and adjust its approach to be supportive of the transition process, whether it likes it or not.

As the United States undertakes a major effort in the reform of the Afghan National Police, assistance to ANP can serve as a good arena for meaningful U.S.-Japan cooperation. In fact, this is one of the most concrete and direct nexuses between the efforts by the two countries. The Japanese government has provided about half of the salary of the entire ANP through the UNDP's Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA), amounting to about \$240 million, which makes Japan the second largest donor after the United States. Furthermore, Japan has assisted in the establishment of the training center for ANP and provided various training

opportunities for a number of Afghan police officers. Although so far Japan has avoided playing a significant role in counterinsurgency operations conducted by the United States and NATO in Afghanistan, its assistance to ANP, which is expected to play a pivotal role in counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, will indirectly contribute to counterinsurgency operations. Hence, the capacity development of ANP can serve as a milestone for finding U.S.-Japan cooperation in the security dimension of the Afghan peacebuilding process.

It is anticipated that close coordination will be necessary between the United States and Japan in order to carry out effective assistance to the ANP. As this nexus will surely control the fate of counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, the United States will have a stake in the success of the capacity development of ANP. Hence, both the United States and Japan will have to seriously and closely discuss how they are going to collaborate in this endeavor in particular and in a wider security sector reform effort in general. This is because the goals of the capacity development of ANP can differ between the United States and Japan, depending on the perceived needs of the situation. As the United States expects ANP, particularly the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP), to take over at least some of the counterinsurgency operations conducted currently by the U.S. and NATO forces, its focus is rather short-sighted and on the creation of effective security forces. On the other hand, Japan is strongly interested in the development of the governance capacity of ANP, as it believes that police officers will serve as a focal point of the government with the people in the frontline.

If the two governments do not appreciate the significance of separately pursuing mutually complementary roles in the capacity development of ANP, frictions could emerge between the two over their competing priorities and emphases. Therefore, it is imperative that the two reaffirm that they share a common strategic goal and agree upon a complementary division of labor.

### ***Division of Labor: the Importance of Local Administrative Bodies***

Another complementary relationship between the United States and Japan in peacebuilding assistance can be envisioned in the geographical division of labor. The presence of the United States is undeniably significant in the capital as well as other strategically important footholds. This is nothing new or special as a large amount of aid has been poured into the capital city in most cases of international peacebuilding assistance. Likewise, international assistance to Afghanistan so far has been concentrated on the capital and other major cities. Hence, Japan can concentrate its efforts in peripheral areas that are either too far away from the center or insignificant in strategic value and thus not included in U.S. efforts.

In Afghanistan, the majority of ordinary people live in the periphery. It is the local administrative bodies such as provincial governments, municipalities, and village offices that have direct contact with these civilians. As stated above, the capacity development of ANP is regarded as one of the top priorities of the United States. On the other hand, the capacity development of the

local administrative bodies has not attracted equal attention although these local administrative bodies are expected to deliver basic services including public safety to the people in the periphery, according to the blueprint of the modern Afghan state. Hence, the capacity development of the local administrative bodies should deserve more than passing notice.

Initially, Japan put forward a policy in which, in addition to Kabul, its assistance was allocated to four major provincial cities, such as Barmian, Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad, and Kandahar. Furthermore, Japan tried to deliver peace dividends to the periphery through grassroots grant projects. These Japanese efforts on the provincial level have certainly served as a complementary measure to other efforts concentrated in the center.

Such a policy, however, has increasingly become difficult to implement as the security situation on the ground deteriorates. Although Japan recognizes the significance of helping the capacity development of the local administrative bodies and is also aware of the potentially complementary role it can play in this field, there is not much Japan can do unilaterally to overcome the ongoing security challenges. Traditionally, Japan expected that other countries with this capacity, namely the United States, to act as the vanguard and eliminate security-related obstacles. However, both the United States and NATO are facing enormous challenges from anti-government forces such as the Taliban, and they do not seem to be able to drastically improve the security situation in peripheral areas. Japan has thus begun to explore possible cooperation with other partners in Afghanistan, including participation in a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) to contribute to stabilization efforts in the periphery.

### *Use of PRT in the Wake of Deteriorating Security Conditions*

Faced with worsening security, Japan has decided to cooperate with NATO/ISAF. In fact, this development can provide a new impetus for further cooperation between the United States and Japan in the area of peacebuilding.

Japan can collaborate with the United States or NATO as a means to deliver peace dividends to the periphery. In particular, PRTs can provide Japan a useful platform for helping local administrative bodies in a non-permissive environment. Indeed, since 2009 Japan has worked with Lithuania in Chaghcharan PRT in Ghor Province by sending civilian development advisors. Japan also dispatched its liaison officers to the NATO/ISAF headquarters in Kabul to coordinate with and provide assistance to NATO/ISAF partners in an effort to design and implement development projects in the periphery.

In most of the rural areas, a PRT is perhaps the only international presence on the ground. Hence, it is natural that Japan seeks to collaborate with PRTs in delivering peace dividends to these areas. However, reconstruction efforts assisted through PRTs so far have primarily been concentrated on providing humanitarian aid and quick-impact projects in the name of peace dividends, and the use of PRTs in the capacity development of the local administrative bodies has been minimal at best. The need for nurturing the governing capability of the local

administrative bodies, which are expected to take over security responsibility from ISAF and to serve as security oversight mechanisms in the provinces, has been either overlooked or deferred. Unless the governing capability and quick-response capability of the local administrative bodies are developed, the United States will face a major problem in the handover of security responsibility, as it is the local administrative bodies that will be in charge of the provision of law and order on the ground as well as civilian oversight of the newly created Afghan Security Forces in the periphery.

The United States and its NATO allies have been preoccupied with developing credible Afghan security forces that can replace ISAF in their counterinsurgency efforts. They give priority to creating effective security forces that can overwhelm the anti-government forces. Hence, Japan can complement American efforts and support the transition of security responsibility by focusing its efforts on assisting the receiving end of the handover process, i.e., local administrative bodies. Japan can advocate the use of PRTs in the enhancement of the governing capability of the local security apparatus.

Moreover, Japan can also complement the efforts of the United States by preparing and consolidating the foundations for the transition of security responsibility in areas of lower security concern. Deteriorating security in the south has forced the United States to become deeply involved in Helmand and Kandahar provinces, while neglecting the relatively stable areas that have the potential to take over the security responsibility from ISAF much earlier than Helmand and Kandahar provinces. Because of the emphasis on security, the majority of U.S. assistance is generally allocated to those areas where anti-government forces are active and the security situation is fragile. Since PRTs have been recognized by the United States and its NATO allies as a counterinsurgency tool used for winning the support of local populations, the primary target of major U.S. PRTs has been set in the southern and eastern part of the country, where security concerns are most pressing. To complement the U.S. efforts in the most fragile regions, Japan can assist PRTs in relatively stable regions and play an instrumental role in encouraging PRTs to assist in the development of the governing capability of the local administrative bodies. This is another possible area for a proactive division of labor between the United States and Japan that requires closer strategic coordination between the two governments.

The effectiveness of PRTs, however, depends largely on the surrounding security and political environment. Up until this point, Japan has remained passive in its policy towards shaping the security and political architecture for Afghanistan. Because of the worsening of the security situation in the center and the periphery, Japan has had to downsize and limit its development assistance in many parts of Afghanistan. Japan has to find a way to create the necessary conditions for effective delivery of peace dividends in a non-permissive environment. The newly launched Afghanistan Peace Reintegration Program (APRP) can offer a key avenue for Japan to tackle such a challenge.

### *Afghanistan Peace Reintegration Program*

In order to guarantee political stability in Afghanistan, political reconciliation and reintegration among various stakeholders including the Taliban are unavoidable. In this sense, the APRP, which was established in June 2010, can provide a useful framework for such an effort. Japan has already allocated \$50 million to APRP, contributing about one-third of the total amount of international assistance to APRP, i.e., \$141 million. It is still too early to evaluate the effectiveness of APRP, but it is fair to say that, from a Japanese perspective, APRP must be closely coordinated with the DIAG program and counterinsurgency operations carried out by the United States and its NATO allies. The activities of APRP must be placed firmly in accordance with a common strategic goal and be coordinated closely with the handover process of security responsibility, which is the greatest concern of the United States and its NATO allies.

Counterinsurgency operations can undermine both DIAG and APRP, and vice versa. Thus, it is imperative that the United States and Japan, together with NATO and other stakeholders in Afghanistan, hold a strategic dialogue over how to go about political reconciliation and reintegration, as the lack of common understanding of a shared strategic goal will lead to contradiction and competition among different initiatives.

It is universally understood that political reconciliation between the incumbent government and the Taliban must be carried out to achieve political stability in Afghanistan. At the same time, many, including the Taliban and ordinary Afghans, are also well aware of the fact that the presence of international forces will eventually decline. The challenge is that the United States has to create a set of conditions under which the Taliban feels it is in its interest to strike a deal with the incumbent government and the United States, in a situation where the U.S. commitment is declining.

This paper does not purport to present a set of recommendations for Japan on the issue of how to shape the scope and core objectives of APRP in relation to a common strategic goal, except to reiterate the importance of searching for complementary combinations and a proactive division of labor between the United States and Japan. Japan will have to engage in serious dialogue with the United States on this issue.

Such a strategic dialogue with the United States over hard-core security issues in Afghanistan might force Japan to seriously explore its roles in politico-military affairs and to commit itself, as an alliance partner of the United States, to various hardships that the United States is now enduring in Afghanistan and elsewhere. However, this does not necessarily mean that Japan will have to commit itself militarily to Afghanistan. The point is, Japan should pursue a complementary partnership with the United States on the strategic level.

### ***Conclusion: From a Follower to a Complementary Partner***

Because the United States has the capacity to solve problems through military means, it falls into a trap of depending too much and relying too hastily on military solutions. On the other hand, because Japan has been deprived of its military capability in solving problems overseas, its policy has a tendency to lean towards non-military solutions and avoid hard decisions. Unless the United States and Japan can fill in such a gap in policy preferences, it is difficult for both countries to agree upon a common strategic goal. There is room for Japan to question and correct errors and miscalculations made by the United States, while the United States can assist Japan to develop its independent capacity to be more effective in peacebuilding and peaceful conflict management.

In the past, both the United States and Japan have appreciated Japan's function as a major financial contributor to international security operations. This approach has increasingly become impractical and unrealistic as Japan's economic power declines. Japan can no longer be used as a "Magical Mallet" that can finance costly military operations. It is important that both countries redefine their relationship with each other. Japan should no longer act as an impotent and nervous follower of the United States in hard-core politico-security endeavors. Japan should be recognized as a partner who can complement the capacity of the United States and supplement in areas where the United States has limitations. Former Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama once advocated for an 'equal relationship' between the United States and Japan. The important point for Japan, in the context of peacebuilding in Afghanistan, is not demanding an *equal* relationship with the United States but engaging in a strategic dialogue with the United States to figure out the best *complementary* partnership for both countries.

To do so, the two countries must share a certain strategic vision. In this sense, this project can offer an ideal platform for identifying possible gaps and searching for a common ground in our efforts towards stabilizing Afghanistan. The United States and Japan should examine their unique positions, comparative advantages and potential both individually and jointly so that they can work together to identify a harmonious and complementary partnership between the two countries.

In particular, peacebuilding experts in Japan will have to rack their brains to find ways to coordinate various Japanese efforts in APRP, DIAG, PRT, and other programs to demonstrate the full potential of Japan's contributions. Furthermore, all Japanese efforts must be in line with a common strategic goal to be able to form an integral part of a wider peacebuilding strategy for Afghanistan.

There is not a moment to lose as the situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating rapidly. The United States and Japan will have to reach a conclusion as to how the two powers can best work to complement each other to contribute to the peacebuilding process in Afghanistan.



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