



ISSUE BRIEF

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PAKISTAN-JAPAN TIES: MOVING TOWARDS A POSITIVE TRAJECTORY

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January 10, 2018

*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do
not represent those of ISSI)*



After a hiatus of eight years, high level diplomatic contact between Pakistan and Japan was renewed with the visit of Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono to Islamabad on January 3-4, 2018. Mr. Kono's visit served to advance Pakistan-Japan bilateral ties in the background of fast changing regional and global scenarios.

Last year also marked the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Earlier, Japanese Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada had visited Pakistan on October 12, 2009. Pakistani Foreign Minister, Hina Rabbani Khar, visited Tokyo on May 24-26, 2012.

Regional developments in South Asia and Afghanistan and issues in the South China Sea have greatly influenced the global geo-politics and there was a dire need to enhance bilateral dialogue and understanding between Pakistan and Japan. High level visits between the two countries were exchanged in 2005 and 2011 when Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited Islamabad and President Asif Ali Zardari visited Tokyo. The revival of ministerial level contact is considered a significant step in promoting diplomatic and economies ties between the two countries.

Mr. Taro Kono was undertaking a visit to three South Asian countries including Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Maldives. During his visit to Islamabad, and his meetings with Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, his counterpart Khawaja Muhammad Asif, and Army Chief General Qamer Javed Bajwa,¹Kono appreciated Pakistan's efforts toward regional peace and security. He mentioned that Japan is willing to enhance security cooperation with Pakistan, to support temporarily displaced

¹ See also Dr Ahmad Rashid Malik, "Taro Kono's Visit", *The Nation* (Islamabad), December 30, 2017.

people in South Waziristan, and to provide scanning equipment for cross-border check-points with Afghanistan.²

Earlier, in December 2017, the Third Japan-Pakistan Consultations meeting in Islamabad on December 19 had also held elaborate discussions on the regional situation on terrorism and counter-terrorism measures.³ The Japanese delegation was led by Ambassador in-charge of International Cooperation for Countering Terrorism, Eiji Yamamoto, who had met with the National Security Adviser Nasser Khan Janjua in Islamabad.

Divergences on security issues have created some misunderstandings that are still prevailing between the two countries. Pakistan expressed concerns on the Japanese-Indian nuclear deal struck on November 11, 2016. Concerns are still prevailing among Pakistani policy-makers about the Japanese-Indian nuclear deal.⁴ Pakistan is concerned that such a deal would undermine regional stability and negatively impact the strategic balance in South Asia.

Conversely, in the past, Japan expressed concerns about Pakistan's nuclear program and what it said was Pakistan's involvement in proliferation and ties with North Korea. Japan may not be fully satisfied with Pakistan's repeated condemnation of North Korean nuclearisation - a perpetual threat to Japan. It has misgivings over Islamabad's friendly ties with Pyongyang. Kono told Islamabad not to follow "loopholes" in UN sanctions on North Korea and "fully implement the relevant US Security Council resolutions against Pyongyang."⁵

Although Japan has remained indifferent on peaceful nuclear cooperation with Pakistan, any step in this direction would be an indication that Japan is willing to follow a non-discriminatory approach to its relations in South Asia. But it looks that Tokyo is still not ready to offer such cooperation to Pakistan.

With regard to cooperation on counter-terrorism, both countries have been involved in mutual consultations, and the Japanese Government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has expressed concerns

² "Pakistan, Japan pledge to reinvigorate ties", *Dawn* (Islamabad), January 5, 2018.

³ The Japan-Pakistan Counter-Terrorism The 3rd Meeting of the Japan-Pakistan Counter-Terrorism Consultations, December 22, 2017. Ministry of foreign Affairs, Tokyo.
http://www.mofa.go.jp/s_sa/sw/pk/page3e_000798.html

⁴ Dr Ahmad Rashid Malik, 'The Indo-Japanese Nuclear Energy Cooperation: A Pakistan's Perspective', *Journal of Security and Strategic Analyses*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Summer 2016).

⁵ "Japan tells Pakistan not to allow 'loopholes' in North Korea sanctions", *The Japan Times* (Tokyo), December 4, 2018.

over the activities of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad in Pakistan.⁶ The Government of Pakistan has already declared these organizations unlawful.

One has to see how both countries would bridge differences on counter-terrorism and forge a common platform. One has to see how Japan, being a close US ally, would respond to Trump's policy toward Pakistan in the present situation? In the past, Japan has faithfully toed the US foreign policy lines and it is unlikely that Japan would follow a different course of action this time. However, Kono's assurance to cooperate with Islamabad on counter-terrorism appears that Tokyo is willing to support Islamabad at a time when Trump is accusing Pakistan of "lies and deceit". For Pakistan, the Japanese support is a welcome relief at this point in time.

Even as Pakistan and Japan moved towards expanding their diplomatic, security and economic horizons, the multi-billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor could also become a source of mutual interaction between Pakistan and Japan. While in the past 32 months after the launch of the CPEC, Japan has not formally expressed its interest in joining the project, Japanese ambassadors, businessmen, and scholars have been quite positive in their opinion about the prospects of joining CPEC in the past several months.⁷ It would be to the benefit of both the countries if Japanese businessmen and companies were to join the Long Term Plan (LTP) of the CPEC recently announced by the Government.

Prime Minister Abe has already expressed Japan's willingness to get involved in the BRI, as long as "the initiative will contribute to regional and global peace and prosperity by adopting ideas held by all in the international community."⁸ Additionally, Kono has also expressed positive views on the Chinese-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and has said that it would be "highly conducive to global economy if carried out in an open manner that is available to all."⁹

Trade Relations

In the past five years, bilateral trade between Pakistan and Japan has been stuck around US\$ 2 billion, with Japanese exports to Pakistan slightly increasing while Pakistan's exports to Japan have

⁶ "India-Japan Joint Statement during Shinzo Abe's visit: Full Text", *The Indian Express* (New Delhi), September 14, 2017.

⁷ Discussion of Japanese diplomats, businessmen, and diplomats with this writer from time to time. See also the Public talks Delivered by Ambassador Inomata & Ambassador Hiroshi Kurai at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) on August 11, 2015 and November 7, 2017 respectively.

⁸ "Abe offers conditional cooperation with China's Silk Road initiative", *The Japan Times* (Tokyo), June 5, 2017.

⁹ "China welcomes Japan's interest in Belt and Road Initiative", *People's Daily Online* (Beijing), November 22, 2017.

plummeted as explained in Table below. Incentives drawn on CPEC would lead to enhance bilateral trade and boost economic activities.

Pakistan's Trade with Japan

<i>Year</i>	<i>Exports</i>	<i>Imports</i>	<i>Total</i>
2012	389	1,860	2,249
2013	431	1,561	1,992
2014	302	1,773	2,075
2015	236	1,842	2,078
2016	171.2	1,961.4	2,132

IMF: *Direction of Trade Statistics*, 2016 & 2017. Washington: International Monetary Fund).

Weakening Investment

In the past, Japan had been a significant Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) contributor, this, however, has declined during 2012-2017 as explained in Table below. Japan invested US\$ 45.2 million during 2016-17, which comprised 1.8 per cent of Pakistan's total FDI.

Japan's FDI in Pakistan during 2012-2017

(US\$ Million)

<i>Year</i>	<i>2012-13</i>	<i>2013-14</i>	<i>2014-15</i>	<i>2015-16</i>	<i>2016-17</i>
	30.1	30.1	71.1	35.4	45.2

"Country Wise FDI Inflows", Islamabad: Board of Investment, 2017.

Conclusion

Imbedded in strong historical links since the Gandhara times and strong diplomatic ties since 1947, security, counter-terrorism, and nuclear issues have largely deviated Pakistan and Japan in recent years. There is a need to put the relations on a robust level and work towards expanding security and building strong economic ties. Forging a strategic partnership between Pakistan and Japan on economic affairs, anti-nuclearisation, security, and counter-terrorism could help dilute mutual concerns and put their relationship on a firm foundation in the years to come.