

Japan and the Persian Gulf

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Brief Analysis

Pease in the Persian Gulf is crucial for international stability, including in East Asia. Moreover, a stable supply of crude oil and natural gas is essential to the United States, the European Union and the Asian countries. Nearly 80 percent of Japan's crude oil imports come from the Gulf region and, by the year 2000, that figure will be close to 90 percent. Asia will be heavily dependent on the Middle East; any oil price increase or threat to supply will be of vital interest to Tokyo.

Currently, Japan wishes to cooperate closely in the Persian Gulf with its friends and allies in the international community in the following ways:

- Japan supports all United Nations resolutions and seeks their full and complete implementation. However, Japan will not use military force in the Gulf to pursue this. Japan's constitution does not allow for the use of force unless it is for self-defense purposes.
- Japan does not export arms or arms technology. The only exception to this is the exchange of military technology to the United States.
- Japan hosts more than 40,000 U.S. troops. This American presence includes the Seventh Fleet and at least 20,000 Marines. These forces were among the first to move to the Gulf after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, and their presence in Japan is strategically important to both Washington and Tokyo.

Japan hopes to continue contributing to the stability of the Gulf region through these and other cooperative endeavors.

GCC Member States. Japan maintains traditionally cordial relations with the GCC states. Almost 50 percent of Japan's oil and gas imports come from the UAE and Saudi Arabia. As Japan cannot secure its supply of oil with military force, Tokyo strives to develop mutual dependence in the trade and investment fields. By creating strong economic incentives for Japanese firms to invest in the GCC states, the Japanese government is working to promote cooperation between its business community and the Gulf countries.

Iran. Japan shares the international community's concerns regarding Iran's behavior. Tokyo has a ban on arms exports to Iran and strictly controls other exports which might help Tehran develop nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. Japanese government officials continue to urge Iran to correct its behavior and to condemn terrorist incidents. In the wake of the Mykonos verdict, Japan's position will be even more stringent. Japan has announced that it will suspend high-level contacts with Iran. However, Japan has not recalled its ambassador from Tehran, as thirteen of the fourteen European countries have, and has no plans to do so.

If Tokyo were to end its dialogue with Iran to further isolate Tehran, many in Japan believe this would force Iran to take more radical steps and, in the long run, would destabilize the entire Gulf region. Thus the United States' policy of containment, according to Japanese officials, is not an effective approach to handling Iran. In addition, Japan has

expressed deep regret at the US Congress' passing of the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act last year. The Japanese government has communicated its position to business-leaders, and these individuals have the freedom to take their own risks in conducting business with Iran.

Iraq. To restore peace in the Gulf, it is imperative to reintegrate Iraq into the Middle East and international communities. This can only be done, however, once Baghdad has complied with all of the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. Although Washington believes that normal relations are impossible while Saddam Hussein remains in power, Japan does not necessarily embrace the U.S. position at this time. Rather, Tokyo feels that there is no linkage between the implementation of the resolutions and the regime which is implementing them: any Iraqi regime that fully complies with the resolutions would be entitled to have sanctions fully lifted. On several occasions Japanese officials have met with Iraqi special envoys and encouraged compliance. Japan regrets that Iraq has not ceased its provocative behavior and believes that the international community must demonstrate its displeasure and resolve in the face of Iraq's refusal to comply with international requirements.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Lauren Rossman.

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