

## JAPANESE DIPLOMACY MAKES NEW HEADWAY IN CENTRAL ASIA: ITS PROBLEMS, EXPECTATIONS, AND PROSPECTS

Marat NURGALIEV

*Researcher at the Kazakhstani Institute for Strategic Studies  
under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Timur SHAYMERGENOV

*Member of the Secretariat of the Kazakhstan Parliament Mejlis  
(Astana, Kazakhstan)*

The geopolitical space of Central Eurasia has long been a wrestling ring for the leading global and regional players. During the fifteen years since the U.S.S.R. disintegrated, specific actors have taken up their position in this process, formulated their goals and interests, and drawn up explicit game rules. Japan did not previously feature on the list of powers taking part in the intensive geopolitical struggle in the region. Since the Central Asian states gained their independence, Japanese policy toward the Central Asian Region (CAR) was not distinguished by high activity. Nevertheless, in the past few years, this player has been showing increased interest in Central Asia, which was aroused by several political and economic factors.

Japan appears to have noticeably activated its diplomatic resources recently for the explicit pur-

pose of enhancing its relations with the CAR countries. It is generally thought that Tokyo's Central Asian diplomacy has its sights set on the energy resources it requires for guaranteeing Japan's energy security against the background of the steadily mounting price of oil. As we know, Tokyo is currently carrying out a new energy strategy aimed at ensuring long-term stable deliveries of oil, gas, and other energy resources in order to boost its economy, which is the second largest in the world.

But if we look closer, it becomes clear that Japan is trying to play an even greater geopolitical role. In so doing, Japanese ambitions are aimed not only at Central Asia, but at Eurasia as a whole—in counterbalance to the growing influence of Moscow and Beijing, as well as, most likely, under Washington's patronage, the Land of the Rising Sun being its long-standing and devoted ally.

## Tokyo's Geopolitical Interests in Central Asia

Whereas Japan's policy used to focus mainly on humanitarian and economic aid to the region's states, Tokyo is now expanding its range of interests in Central Asia and building a more concise foreign policy strategy toward the CAR. The Japanese leadership probably understands that its former approach and emphasis on building its international image as a peace-loving economic power is no longer sufficient. As Central Asia becomes gradually integrated into the world globalization processes, relations with the Central Asian countries must be developed in other more practical areas of cooperation.

The changes in Japan's policy largely go hand in hand with Central Asia's new role as a potential alternative to the Far Eastern Region for the export of energy resources. The fact that the Central Asian states themselves have begun playing a greater role in the rivalry among the major geopolitical players is also very important.

Japan's initiation of projects aimed at comprehensive interaction with the Central Asian countries in the economy, politics, and security shows that Tokyo is activating its policy toward CAR. In August 2004, during the visit of Japanese Foreign Minister Junko Kawaguti to the Central Asian states, a Central Asia + Japan dialog (CAJD) was launched.

Since its meetings are held irregularly and the interaction among the member states of this forum is low, it is difficult to talk confidently about the effectiveness of this structure. However, several Japanese researchers claim that the Central Asia + Japan dialog is a new stage in the establishment of relations between Tokyo and the Central Asian states. For example, some Japanese experts note that since the CAJD began, cooperation with the Central Asian countries has been raised to a higher level. But this claim is extremely disputable, and the success of Tokyo's diplomacy will largely depend on what it can offer the region's states.

Within the framework of the dialog, Japan intends to promote a multilateral approach in regional cooperation between the Central Asian countries. In comparison with Eurasian diplomacy, the Central Asia + Japan dialog advanced institutionally largely because decisions in the Japanese government are made "from the bottom up," particularly in the Foreign Ministry.<sup>1</sup>

It has recently become obvious that Tokyo is trying to raise the authority of the dialog, which is shown by the fact that meetings are being held more frequently at different levels within the framework of the CAJD. Last February, the second meeting of high-ranking officials of the dialog member states was held in Astana. In June 2006, a meeting was held in Tokyo at the level of foreign ministers of the CAJD states.

The increased interest of the world mass media in the policy conducted by Japan toward CAR is also indicative. For example, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visit to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan at the end of August 2006 aroused a wide response in the international press. This event attracted the lively interest of several leading publications of the world mass media, such as *Japan Today*, *Arab News*, *Reuters*, and the BBC.

According to well-known Kazakhstani political scientist Murat Laumulin, this visit "was largely symbolic, since it designated the end of an era of indefiniteness in Japan's policy and strategy toward Central Asia. When looking over the one-and-a-half decades of the post-Soviet era, our attention is drawn to Japan's perfunctory declaration of its interests in Central Asia and Eurasia. I am referring to the Great Silk Road doctrine. But in reality, Tokyo did not begin taking specific steps in the political, economic, and broader geo-economic respect until the second half of Koizumi's term as prime minister."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> T. Yuasa, "Stroitelstvo dvustoronnego partnerstva v ramkakh dialoga 'Tsentral'naia Azia + Iaponiia,'" in: *Kazakhstansko-iaponskoe sotrudnichestvo: sostoianie i perspektivy: materialy mezhdunarodnogo "kruglogo stola,"* 5 December, 2006, Kazakhstani Institute for Strategic Studies under the Kazakhstan President, Almaty, 2007, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> M. Laumulin, "Strategiia Iaponii v Evrazii," in: *Kazakhstansko-iaponskoe sotrudnichestvo: sostoianie i perspektivy: materialy mezhdunarodnogo "kruglogo stola,"* 5 December, 2006, p. 33.

An analysis of Japan's regional initiatives shows the following foreign policy interests of this country in CAR:

**1. Ensuring the country's energy security by increasing its access to Central Asia's energy resources.** The Middle Eastern states are the main oil exporters to Japan. Taking into account the high conflict potential in this region (escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, aggravation of the political situation in Iraq, and growing pressure from the U.S. and the West on Iran regarding its nuclear program), Tokyo is interested in looking for new partners capable of guaranteeing stable and uninterrupted deliveries of energy resources to Japan. Diversifying the routes for importing energy resources should lower Japan's dependence on the Arab world. In August 2006, before leaving for Astana, Premier Koizumi announced Tokyo's interest in Central Asia's energy resources. "As for our strategy regarding energy resources, it is not good for Japan to be too dependent on the Middle East. Whereas Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are the fortunate owners of vast supplies of resources," he emphasized.<sup>3</sup> This statement unambiguously shows Tokyo's interest in the energy sector of the Central Asian countries.

The following facts show Japan's interest in developing and intensifying its relations with the Central Asian states in the energy sphere:

- In May 2006, the Japanese Ministry of Economics, Trade, and Industry published a *new national energy strategy*, in which the need was emphasized for expanding Japan's ties with states rich in energy resources. This project was to be based on the creation of powerful transnational corporations for extracting, processing, and transporting raw materials. That is, if, for example, the share of Japan's domestic oil-production and transportation companies currently amounts to approximately 15%, by 2030, it should reach 40%.<sup>4</sup>
- Japanese officials are emphasizing the need in their statements to expand partnership with the Central Asian countries in the energy sphere. The Japanese prime minister made his first visit in history to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on 28-31 August. At his meeting with Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbaev, Junichiro Koizumi emphasized that the Japanese side intended to intensify cooperation with Kazakhstan in the nuclear energy sphere, including in the development of uranium fields. The meeting ended in the sides signing a Memorandum of Intent between the governments of Kazakhstan and Japan on advancing their partnership in the use of nuclear energy.

**2. Tokyo is also interested in cooperating with Central Asian states to counterbalance the extreme increase in China's and Russia's influence in CAR.** Japan is a strategic rival of the PRC on the international arena. These two nations are locked in a geopolitical struggle for leadership in the Asia Pacific Region. A case in point are the regular visits by high-ranking Japanese officials to the Yasukuni Shrine, which arouses severe criticism from the PRC and accusations of Tokyo adhering to its militaristic past. The situation is aggravated by China's territorial claims against Japan over the Senkaku or Diaoyutai islands, as well as the rivalry between the two countries in gaining access to Siberia's energy resources. In this respect, Tokyo is keeping a close eye on the strengthening of Beijing's international position, as well as the build-up of its military-political and economic potential, viewing this as a threat to its own strategic interests.

There are also diplomatic difficulties in interrelations with Russia, the main reason for which are Japan's territorial claims to the Southern Kuril islands, which periodically give rise to conflicts between Russian border guards and Japanese fishing boats. In addition, misunderstandings regularly arise in Russian-Japanese relations over cooperation in developing East Siberia's natural riches.

<sup>3</sup> A. Dubnov, "Proshchalnyy visit Koizumi," *Vremia novostei*, 29 August, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> See: B. Sultanov, "Aziatskiy vector vneshney politiki RK," in: *Kazakhstansko-iaponskoe sotrudnichestvo: sostoi-anie i perspektivy: materialy mezhdunarodnogo "kruglogo stola,"* 5 December, 2006, p. 8.

It should be noted that the contradictions in Japan's interrelations with China and Russia are aggravating the rivalry between these actors in Central Asia. In this respect, it appears obvious that the PRC's stronger position in the region and, moreover, the more reliable partnership between China and the Russian Federation within the framework of regional organizations are not to Tokyo's advantage. The increased role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in ensuring regional security, as well as the active participation of Chinese and Russian energy companies in Central Asia, are arousing Japan's great concern.

In particular, Tokyo regards these initiatives as direct growth in Russia's and China's political and economic influence in Central Asia, which could in the future prevent the Land of the Rising Sun from realizing its interests in this region. According to some Japanese experts, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is largely to blame for the fact that the Western countries, as well as Japan, have developed negative impressions about this structure. For example, Japanese expert A. Ivashita believes that these negative images must be eliminated in order to resolve this problem. This could be achieved by involving the Western states in the SCO, whereby Japan could also possibly join the SCO. This step would demonstrate the organization's openness to the world community and, in particular, to countries showing an interest in the Central Asian region.<sup>5</sup>

The second meeting of the Central Asia + Japan dialog member states held in Tokyo on 5 June, 2006 at the foreign minister level showed that Tokyo is trying to counterbalance its own initiatives in Central Asia against the growing influence of China and the SCO. Kazakhstan was represented at this meeting by deputy foreign minister and chargé d'affaires of the republic's government K. Abdrahmanov. It is worth noting that the meeting was organized on the eve of the SCO summit, which was closely followed by the international community and particularly by the Western nations.

The main result of the meeting was that the participants adopted a plan of action defining the priority areas in cooperation between the Central Asian countries and Japan in the mid-term. Under the said project, the following decisions were made:

- on holding similar meetings (at the foreign ministerial level) on a regular basis;
- on reviewing the question of organizing a summit within the framework of the CAJD: Russia will most likely not approve of convening such a symposium, and China will also regard it as a threat from Japan to the regional interests of the two powers;
- on intensifying Tokyo's partnership with the Central Asian countries to ensure regional security: this sphere of interaction will include questions of reinforcing the border, intercepting drug trafficking, destroying antipersonnel mines, and combating terrorism;
- on increasing Japan's assistance to the Central Asian states in combating poverty and resolving environmental problems.

Moreover, at the above-mentioned June meeting in 2006, the member states agreed to continue cooperating in drawing up projects for forming new routes to deliver oil, natural gas, and other raw materials from CAR to the world markets via Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean.<sup>6</sup> The very fact that the action plan was adopted shows that Tokyo has its sights set on developing comprehensive relations with the Central Asian states.

Japan is actively supporting projects for building oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia in the southerly direction with the prospect of access to the Southeast Asia market, which, of course, will also include the Land of the Rising Sun in the future.

<sup>5</sup> See: A. Ivashita, "Geopolitika v Tsentral'noi Azii: vzgliad iz Iaponii," in: *Kazakhstansko-iaponskoe sotrudnichestvo: sostoianie i perspektivy: materialy mezhdunarodnogo "kruglogo stola," 5 December, 2006*, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> According to the report by the Regnum Agency, available at [www.regnum.ru].

**3. Tokyo's support of U.S. policy in CAR.** Japan is the U.S.'s ally and junior partner in ensuring security in the Asia Pacific Region, Southeast Asia and, most likely in the future, Central Asia. Washington's increased influence in Central Asia, in counterbalance to the growing foreign policy ambitions of Russia and China, seems advantageous to Tokyo, since in this case the projects for exporting energy resources from the Central Asia Region to Japan will have more active support from the White House administration.

Another important geopolitical aspect of Tokyo's policy in Central Asia is regional security, which implies active support of the U.S.'s initiatives in CAR to fight international terrorism, strengthen democracy, and enhance human rights. This is shown by the facts presented below.

- In August 2004, after the CAJD forum opened, its participants adopted a joint statement expressing the intention of the sides to cooperate in strengthening peace and regional security. The document underlined that the Central Asian countries and Japan were ready to continue their assistance in the stabilization and restoration of Afghanistan, as well as in the formation of a single state on its territory by helping to develop democracy in this country.
- In November 2005, Afghanistan joined the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Organization created on Tokyo's initiative with support from the Asian Bank of Development.
- During Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to Uzbekistan at the end of August 2006, the leaders of the two states also discussed other topics in addition to energy cooperation issues. In particular, during the talks, Mr. Koizumi noted that Tokyo was willing to help Tashkent restore its relations with the United States. Moreover, he emphasized that friendly interrelations between Japan and Uzbekistan would lead to an improvement in the latter's relations with America and the European Union. In this respect, it is possible that Mr. Koizumi's visit, in addition to expanding partnership relations in the energy sphere, was also aimed at continuing the talks with Islam Karimov designed to restore positive contacts with Washington. It is worth noting that Mr. Koizumi's visit to Uzbekistan took place after U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher visited in August 2006.<sup>7</sup>

The tasks to ensure regional security and combat terrorism raised by the participants in the Central Asia + Japan dialog largely coincide with the SCO's tasks, which shows that the foreign powers have similar interests in the region. In this respect, it is obvious that Tokyo, which is posing itself as a reliable partner of the Central Asian states, is also playing the role of mediator in stabilizing and developing relations between the Central Asian countries and the United States.

It is very possible that the dynamic development of interaction among the CAR states in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization does not correspond to the strategic interests of the U.S. and Japan in Central Asia. Both Tokyo and Washington clearly understand that if they do not take active measures, this forum will soon take on the form of an open division in the sphere of influence and their subsequent reinforcement in the Eurasian expanse.

When analyzing Japan's strategy, it becomes obvious that the country's establishment positioned CAJD as a foreign policy tool capable of enlarging Japan's presence in Central Asia and realizing Tokyo's above-mentioned geopolitical interests in the region. This is also shown by the regularity with which meetings are held within the framework of the dialog, but it is still too early to draw any conclusions about their effectiveness.

In order to ensure its geopolitical interests, Japan is strengthening its interrelations with the Central Asian republics within the framework of CAJD in the following areas:

- **Economic cooperation**—development of the market economy and advancement of the Japanese model of economic development are helping to raise Tokyo's international prestige.

<sup>7</sup> See: Japan's Incursion into Central Asia, available at [www.easttime.ru].

- **Political cooperation**—development of democracy, but keeping in mind the special features and cultural-historical specifics of the region's states, which also means their interests.
- **Cooperation in ensuring security and building regional stability**—combating terrorism and drug trafficking. Due to several objective circumstances to be discussed below, this is a secondary priority for Japan in streamlining its relations with the CAR countries.
- **Humanitarian cooperation**—combating poverty and cooperating in environmental security are traditional spheres of Tokyo's partnership with the post-Soviet states.

Japan's tactics in CAR are distinguished by great caution. This is understandable, since when Central Asia is only just starting to attract the attention of contemporary Japanese diplomacy, the U.S., Russia, and China are already flexing their muscles in this energy-rich region and vying with each other for access to the energy resources.<sup>8</sup>

## The Special Features of Japan's Policy in Central Asia

On the whole it is obvious today, both based on reality and on the conclusions of most experts, that Tokyo's policy in Central Asia is based on a relatively low level of involvement in the region's affairs, and so it is having a minimal effect on the regional processes (if any at all).

Japan's participation in CAR mainly boils down to financing joint projects in energy, transport, and communications. Trade relations between the CA countries and Tokyo are also at a low level, although they are showing a steady tendency toward growth. For example, whereas in 2005, the overall trade turnover between Kazakhstan and Japan amounted to 736.1 million dollars, in 2006, this index was equal to 1,128.2 million dollars, i.e. almost double.<sup>9</sup> But if we take the economic potential of the two states into account, these indices are insignificant compared with Kazakhstan's trade turnover with other countries.

Tokyo's relatively insignificant participation in the regional processes in CA is explained by the following objective factors, which are hindering an increase in Japan's influence in CAR:

- **Japan's geographical distance** from Central Asia makes it difficult to increase its influence in the region in the same way as Russia or China, with respect to which the Central Asian states historically do not belong to the sphere of Tokyo's direct political and economic interests.
- **Japan is not a powerful military nation** and cannot use the force factor to bring more pressure to bear on the Central Asian countries. Moreover, Tokyo does not have broad prospects for participating in the regional security processes. In this respect, the Land of the Rising Sun also loses out to Moscow and Beijing.
- **Japan's cultural remoteness and the low use of the Japanese language in Central Asia** are important factors that interfere with Tokyo reaching its strategic goals in the region.
- **The absence of direct common interests between Japan and the Central Asian countries in ensuring security.** In this sphere, the priority areas of Japanese foreign policy are the United States of America, the Asia Pacific Region, and Southeast Asia.

On the other hand, the following factors can be described as being conducive to the further intensification of Tokyo's relations with the Central Asian countries:

<sup>8</sup> See: Japan's Incursion into Central Asia.

<sup>9</sup> According to the data of the Republic of Kazakhstan Statistics Agency, available at [[www.stat.kz/index.php?lang=rus&uin=1171355564](http://www.stat.kz/index.php?lang=rus&uin=1171355564)].

- **Broad financial possibilities.**<sup>10</sup> Japan has vast investment potential for implementing expensive joint projects with the CA states in energy and the development of the region's transportation and communication network.
- **The Central Asian countries have formed a positive image of Japan as a peace-loving power,** which is raising mutual trust on the way to bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Japan's image as an economically developed Asian state is promoting further intensification of economic contacts with the region's countries.
- **Tokyo is in favor of advancing democracy and enhancing human rights, but it is not imposing its own opinion on the Central Asian states.** Japan is willing to take into account the cultural and traditional characteristics of the region's countries in the democratization process. For example, at a meeting between Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov at the end of last August, Prime Minister Koizumi did not make any harsh comments about human rights violations and restrictions of democratic freedoms, but at the same time noted that Tokyo would like to see Uzbekistan a democratic state. Japan's sufficiently correct and diplomatic position regarding political reforms is conducive to building favorable relations with the Central Asian countries.

Summing up the positive and negative factors that are having a determinative effect on the formation of Tokyo's policy in Central Asia, it can be stated that, on the whole, Japan has sufficient possibilities for successfully advancing cooperation with the Central Asian countries in the economy, finances, and energy.

But, taking into account the trends toward an augmentation in the influence of the major regional actors (Russia and China) in Central Asia, it should be noted that Japan cannot compete with these nations at present for leadership in CAR. In this respect, CAJD should be regarded as a platform for gradually strengthening contacts with the Central Asian countries, as well as for further opening up cooperation prospects at new and more important stages of partnership.

## New Premier—New Policy?

Keeping in mind the trends that have developed in Japan's CAR policy, in particular, Tokyo's increased interest in the region's energy sources, and, as a result, Japan's intensified contacts with the Central Asian states, it must be stressed that cooperation between the Land of the Rising Sun and the CA states will continue to grow. Japan's new prime minister, Shinzo Abe, repeatedly emphasized at the end of September 2006, before he assumed his post, that Tokyo is striving to increase its own role and geopolitical position on the international arena.

Tokyo's ambitious plans will have a significant influence on the further development of relations with the Central Asian states. But it should also be noted that Japan is pursuing different goals in bilateral contacts. The fact that during his historical (or first) visit to CAR, Prime Minister Koizumi met with only two leaders of the Central Asian states—Nursultan Nazarbaev and Islam Karimov—also indicates Tokyo's priorities in the region. It is obvious that the Japanese premier's visits to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were motivated by the desire to raise the level of relations with these countries particularly due to their rich natural resources, which Mr. Koizumi openly stated during his meeting with Nursultan Nazarbaev in Astana.

---

<sup>10</sup> Japan is the largest financial donor of the Central Asian states. Tokyo's official assistance to the development of the Central Asian countries amounted to more than 2 billion dollars between 1991 and 2004. According to the data of the National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the total amount of Japan's direct investments in Kazakhstan amounted to \$1 billion between 1993 and 2005, and to \$75.4 million in the first six months of 2006.

With respect to **Kazakhstan** and **Uzbekistan**, the new Japanese government is steering a course toward increasing the flow of investments and increasing its presence as much as possible in the energy sectors of both republics. Along with Tokyo's increased interest in the region's oil and gas supplies, Japan's attention is being attracted in particular by the prospect of joint development of uranium fields. At the current stage, the following prerequisites exist for Tokyo's partnership with Astana and Tashkent in this sphere:

- In March 2006—during the 8th joint sitting of the Kazakhstan-Japanese and Japanese-Kazakhstan committees on economic cooperation in Astana—Japanese businessmen stated that Japan's level of direct investments in Kazakhstan was insufficient.<sup>11</sup>
- 28 August, 2006—during Junichiro Koizumi's visit to Kazakhstan—Kazakhstan Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources B. Izmukhambetov and Japanese ambassador to Astana T. Ito signed a memorandum of intent of the two states to advance cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy. After signing the document, the premier of the Land of the Rising Sun stated that it would "serve as the basis for greater cooperation between Kazakhstan and Japan, including in the sphere of nuclear energy and particularly in developing uranium fields."<sup>12</sup>
- During Mr. Koizumi's visit to Uzbekistan (29-30 August, 2006), the sides discussed the prospect of delivering raw uranium from Uzbekistan for nuclear power stations in Japan, as well as the possibility of developing the republic's oil and gas fields with the participation of Japanese capital.
- In April 2007, Japan's large energy companies—Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) and Chubu Electric Power Company—acquired a share in the authorized capital of Kazatomprom's subsidiary structures—Kyzylkum and Baiken-U, after acquiring the right to participate in operating the Kharassan-1 and Kharassan-2 uranium fields in the south of Kazakhstan. Joint production is starting in 2007 and, according to the plans of Japanese businessmen, should reach full capacity by 2014, which will amount to 5,000 tons of uranium a year. There are plans to carry out the project until 2050.<sup>13</sup>
- Moreover, at the end of April, Japanese Minister of Economics, Trade, and Industry A. Amari visited Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. During his visit to Astana, a joint statement was signed between Kazakhstan and Japan on developing cooperation in uranium processing technology and in building nuclear reactors using light water in exchange for deliveries of uranium.<sup>14</sup>

In this way, it appears obvious that the arrival of the new premier will give Japan's strategy in Central Asia even clearer contours. Practical steps are gradually being taken to establish partnership with the Central Asian countries in the energy sector.

When analyzing Japan's policy in its relations with the other Central Asian states, we can also see its interest in **Turkmenistan**, which possesses the largest resources of natural gas among the CAR countries. But Turkmenistan is loath to establish contact with Tokyo within the CAJD forum, which is obvious from the level of Ashgabad's participation in Japan's initiatives, mainly boiling down to observation. For example, last February, the Turkmen side was represented by an observer at a meeting in Astana of high-ranking officials of the CAJD member states, while Turkmenistan refused to

<sup>11</sup> According to the report of the Kazinform Agency, available at [www.inform.kz].

<sup>12</sup> News Archives of the Republic of Kazakhstan Foreign Ministry, available at [www.mfa.kz].

<sup>13</sup> See: "'Kazatomprom' nameren zaniat' bolee 40% rynka iadernogo topliva Iaponii posle 2010 goda," available at [www.nomad.su/?a=4-200704170219].

<sup>14</sup> See: News Archives of the Republic of Kazakhstan Foreign Ministry.



send its representative at all to a foreign ministerial meeting of the member states of this forum held in Tokyo.

The change in power in Turkmenistan could mean that energy cooperation between Japan and Turkmenistan might shift to a practical level, but there are no real prerequisites for this so far, particularly in light of the May Russian-Kazakh-Turkmen oil and gas contracts.

Japan's relations with **Kyrgyzstan** and **Tajikistan** are of secondary significance at the present stage, which is associated with the following objective reasons:

- **Political risks in both republics.** In Kyrgyzstan, there is currently a trend toward aggravation of the political crisis. The influence and authority of the opposition are rising due to the ongoing socioeconomic and political crisis in the country. In Tajikistan, the risks of political destabilization are rising due to aggravation of the political situation in neighboring Afghanistan, and the increase in the activity of religious extremist movements and drug trafficking, most of which passes through the territory of Tajikistan. Taking into account the low level of political stability in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Tokyo will pay less attention to these republics in its investment projects, since Japanese investors are distinguished by high demands with respect to risks, as well as to the dividends to be drawn from the invested capital.
- **Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan do not possess large supplies of hydrocarbons**, which Japan's investment capital is interested in and which is a determinative factor in expanding cooperation with these countries.

In addition, the geographical location of the two republics is of special importance in Tokyo's interrelations with Bishkek and Dushanbe, in particular their proximity to Afghanistan. Japan periodically puts forward initiatives aimed at building a transportation corridor from Central Asia to the south, in which Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will play the role of a link between Afghanistan and other countries of the region. In this respect, Tokyo's priority task in forming its own foreign policy regarding the mentioned Central Asian states is to create an integrated Greater Central Asian region, including Afghanistan, which is politically and economically less dependent on the leading regional actors (Russia and China). On the whole, in addition to developing economic contacts, Japan is also focusing attention on intensifying relations in cultural and humanitarian partnership in its interrelations with the CAR countries in order to stimulate the region's overall economic and regional security. Tokyo is singling out regional security as an equally important area of multilateral cooperation with the Central Asian states within the CAJD, but it does not seem likely that Japan will raise its role in CAR in this area. Tokyo will most likely continue to participate in the region's security affairs at the political-consultative level.

## **Kazakhstan-Japan: Is Cooperation Mutually Beneficial?**

Tokyo's initiatives in Central Asia correspond in general with Kazakhstan's economic and geopolitical interests for the following reasons:

1. **Economic importance.** At present, Kazakhstan's economy is increasingly in need of foreign direct investments. Attracting Japanese capital into building the country's energy potential, as well as into small and medium business, transport, communications, infrastructure, and high technologies are urgent tasks of Kazakhstan's foreign policy aimed at transferring its industry from production to processing and achieving the goal of becoming one of the 50 most

developed states of the world, set by the country's president, Nursultan Nazarbaev.<sup>15</sup> Efforts to exchange experience in economic development are just as important.

2. **Political importance.** The Central Asia + Japan dialog is a forum that promotes free exchange of opinions and experience with Tokyo regarding Kazakhstan's sustainable and democratic development. From this point of view, Japan is a valuable partner for Kazakhstan in the further intensification of cooperation.
3. **Geopolitical importance.** Building friendly relations with Tokyo within the framework of a multi-vector policy will make it possible to more efficiently maintain the geopolitical balance of forces in Central Asia. The CAJD forum could become an additional structure in the region that will help to reduce the West's apprehension over CAR becoming a zone of China's or Russia's political influence. In this respect, Japan's initiative in maintaining regional security, combating terrorism and drug trafficking, and reinforcing the borders within the CAJD framework appears important for strengthening overall stability in the Central Asian Region.

So it is obvious that Kazakhstan is focusing its attention in cooperation with Japan on developing partnership in the economy, politics, and security. The above-mentioned dialog being actively promoted by Japan at present is opening up possibilities for Kazakhstan to augment its interaction with Tokyo in the indicated areas. Expanding contacts with Japan within the CAJD forum is having a positive effect on raising the state's image in the eyes of the world community and having a beneficial influence on the economic development of both Kazakhstan and the Central Asian Region as a whole.

## The Prospects for Japanese Diplomacy

The Land of the Rising Sun's policy in Central Asia is acquiring increasingly clear contours at present. Tokyo's obviously increased interest in the CA is manifested in the specific tasks it has set: augmenting Japan's political significance in the region's affairs and increasing the country's access to CAR's energy resources.

Tokyo's proposal to initiate regional cooperation in certain areas indicates its striving to make a qualitative change in its role in the processes going on in Central Asia. Whereas Japan was previously bent on creating its positive image as a nation wishing to help the young independent CA republics at a difficult time, being guided by "strictly altruistic considerations," but in reality trying to gain the support of the Central Asian countries to obtain the status of permanent member in the U.N. Security Council, now it is offering "to work together for the sake of the common good" in its initiating role; admittedly, far more serious intentions could be hidden behind this.

As some experts believe, the role Tokyo is playing in certain areas of regional partnership can be seen in the long term as an alternative to any form of CAR integration with the participation of Russia and China. Moreover, Japan might be much more preferable for the region's states since, first, it presents a unique example of economic success, technical progress, and prosperity, and, second, due to its distance from Central Asia, any possible increase in its influence will not be perceived as a potential threat, as frequently applies to China, and, possibly, to Russia. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that Tokyo's active participation in the region will be closely tied with the U.S.'s policy in Central Asia. In the long term, America's military power and Japan's economic potential, taking

<sup>15</sup> See: *Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N. Nazarbaev "Strategy of Kazakhstan Becoming One of the 50 Most Competitive States of the World: Priorities and Ways to Implement It,"* Kazakhstani Institute for Strategic Studies, Almaty, 2006, 152 pages.

into account the streamlined mechanism of interaction along these lines in other areas of the world, could become serious factors of influence when divvying up Central Asia's energy resources.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, it should be noted that the Land of the Rising Sun's presence in Central Asia is still very insignificant compared with the other regional players. Japanese companies do not have any significant influence in CAR's energy sector, which is primarily related to the high level of competition from Russian, Chinese, and Western companies, as well as to Japan's geographical distance from the region.

On the other hand, Tokyo is continuing to initiate various projects in other areas of cooperation, such as ensuring stability and regional security, advancing democratic values, and enhancing human rights. However, the nature of its participation in these processes is declarative and, consequently, it objectively remains an outsider in the regional geopolitical game. It is no accident that the functions of the CAJD forum are universal and do not only boil down to strengthening multilateral economic partnership, thus showing Japan's desire to raise the level of its relations with the Central Asian states, as well as in other key areas of interaction. It is presumed that the following factors will have an influence on Tokyo's position in Central Asia:

- **first**, the Russian factor: Japanese-Russian relations—despite their outward constructivism—have serious historical contradictions involving the territorial issue. In addition, taking into account that CAR is a zone of Russia's strategic interests, the Kremlin is unlikely to silently look on as Japan, America's ally, ensconces itself in the region;
- **second**, the Chinese factor: China, as we are well aware, has its own far-reaching plans and interests regarding Central Eurasia. The PRC has long been positioning itself as an empire with corresponding ambitions; moreover, if we take into account the historical memory of the Chinese people and all its claims against the Japanese, revenge is probably only a matter of time;
- **third**, the U.S. factor: Washington is rapidly losing its foothold in Central Asia, the situation in Afghanistan has become aggravated, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for America to retain its military presence in Kyrgyzstan. So if Japanese diplomacy is unable to prove that it has its own goals in the region, and is not lobbying American interests, its chances are extremely small;
- **and, fourth**, the Central Asian factor: the Central Asian countries have already formed their priorities. They have their own interests, they are gradually acquiring confidence in international issues and augmenting their role in the regional processes. On the whole, it can be said that the CAR countries are developing their own policy of interrelations with the major foreign players and, as we have already indicated above, Tokyo's geopolitical and energy prospects will largely depend on Japan's proposals and on how beneficial they will be to the region.

Nevertheless, as the foreign players (primarily Russia, China, and the U.S.) step up their activity in Central Asia and, consequently, the struggle for influence gains momentum, Kazakhstan and the other CA republics will also have to develop other foreign policy vectors to keep pace. In this respect, Japan, as a leading Asian economic power, could become precisely that force, the advancement of close cooperation with which will make it possible for both Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian states to establish a certain geopolitical balance in the region.

---

<sup>16</sup> See: E. Usabaliev, "'Transformatsiia Tsentralnoi Azii v koridor mira i stabilnosti'—novaia initsiativa Iaponii," available at [www.easttime.ru].