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JAPAN'S CONTRIBUTION TOWARD AFGHAN STATE BUILDING

---At the Eve of U.S. Policy Review---

Sadako Ogata

As the new United States administration embarks on a wide range of global policy reviews, it has clearly indicated the priority of focusing on Afghanistan. The quick designation and dispatch of Richard Holbrooke as the President's special envoy to Pakistan and Afghanistan underline the importance attached by the Obama administration.

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In fact, winning the security and stability in Afghanistan has proven to be a formidable task. The Obama administration has announced its readiness to redirect major military resources to Afghanistan. It has also recognized that a purely military solution to the growing insurgency situation in the country will not be possible, and has called for a strategy that brings reconstruction programs and other assistance together to gain overall security grounds.

As to Japan, it should be noted that it took an active part in the international action against terrorism and the reconstruction of Afghanistan. For a long time, Japan had entertained a special interest in the political stability and economic development of Central Asia. It offered to mobilize and host the first Afghan reconstruction conference in Tokyo on 21-22 January, 2002. With the participation of sixty-one countries and twenty-one international organizations, and the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and UNDP presenting the assessment report on reconstruction requirements, the international collaborative action took a good start.

The reconstruction of Afghanistan had to be carried out on two fronts: state and society. At the state level, the most urgent task was to establish nationwide peace and security and a functioning government. The UN Security Council authorized the deployment of the International Security Force (ISAF) to Kabul, but it did not set up any unified international security operation throughout the country. The Afghan Interim Administration was the only responsible governing body, supported by the United Nations Assistance Mission (UNAMA) led by Lakhdar Brahimi. The Afghan administrative capacity was still very limited but a host of measures --- education, health, infrastructure installments --- had to be introduced to cope with the needs of a vast number of destitute people and returning refugees. The United Nations humanitarian agencies which had been present during the war years mobilized support and led the early assistance operations.

Japan worked closely with the UN agencies --- UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP --- in the early rehabilitation and construction phase. It helped the financing of multi-sector reintegration programs for returning Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons in three geographical areas of Kandahar,

Jalalabad and Mazar-i-Sharif. The first stage was to meet their immediate needs of transportation, shelter, water, education and health. The second phase was to identify and boost income generation activities. These efforts, carried out in the two years from the summer of 2002 to the spring of 2004, filled the necessary gap in the transition phase of Afghan nation building, and helped lead the way to longer term reconstruction.

In order to enhance the effects of peace and the impact of reconstruction throughout the country, the Afghan government took strong interest in large scale rehabilitation activities, particularly the rehabilitation of the major highway through Kabul, Kandahar and Herat. Already at the time of the Tokyo Reconstruction conference, the issue had been raised but remained unaddressed because of the difficulty over the financing modalities. The Afghan government would not agree to the usage of loans and insisted on grant aid. The issue finally hit the highest level of the US administration. With the intervention by President Bush and agreement with Prime Minister Koizumi, a joint US-Japan highway project was agreed upon with commitment of a grant assistance totaling eighteen million dollars. Saudi Arabia, European Union and other governments joined in and participated in the road construction program.

In the course of 2004 following the presidential and parliamentary elections, Hamid Karzai assumed the presidency of the Afghan government. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), in collaboration with the Afghan government, undertook a wide range of development program, and decided on three priority areas of assistance. First was integrated rural development program to promote agriculture and enhance the livelihood of rural communities. Second was the improvement of basic human needs especially with regard to education and healthcare. The third was urban development particularly focused on Kabul that faced rapid population increase and serious infrastructure and social rehabilitation needs.

On rural development, national agriculture experiment stations were rehabilitated in several provinces, with the one in Nangahar province, concentrating on the improvement of rice cultivation techniques. At present the technology advanced is ready to be transferred nationally, especially to the

northern provinces where together with the rehabilitation of irrigation facilities, substantial increase in rice production can be expected. As to education and health, more than 500 schools have been either constructed or repaired, together with the training of some 10,000 teachers. Special attention has been given to the training of female teachers in order to expand the education coverage of girls. In health care, aside from building clinics and providing polio and BCG vaccines, intensive training programs have been advanced with regard to the control of tuberculosis and reproductive health. These programs will continue and will expand in accordance with the needs.


Of all the urban development programs, the Metropolitan Kabul Area Development program requires special mention. Due to massive population increase, old and dilapidated infrastructure, and ever expanding administrative requirements, the Afghan government had felt the need to revamp and reconstruct Kabul. In response to the strong request of the Ministry of Urban Development, JICA agreed to undertake the Kabul Metropolitan Area Development Master Plan which incorporates the revitalization of existing Kabul as well as the development of the adjacent new city. The study on the topographic mapping for greater Kabul has already begun. In November 2008, Japan completed the building of the Kabul Airport Terminal by grant aid, and handed it over to the Afghan government.

So far, Japan has concentrated on the economic and social reconstruction and development of Afghanistan, and won support and appreciation from the government as well as the people. Japan, however, is not unaware of the importance of confronting the security issues that have deteriorated drastically in the last few years. In fact Japan made serious efforts in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of former Afghan combatants in accordance with the division of responsibilities that had been agreed among the major states. It completed the demobilization of 60,000 combatants in June 2006, and Japan continues to pursue the disbandment of illegal armed groups (DIAG). This operation is closely linked with the development of the areas of return, and has been undertaken closely together with rural development projects. More recently, Japan has also set up the Police

Enforcement Training and has started the program of inviting senior policy officers for advanced training in Japan.

As a basically civilian state, Japan's reconstruction contributions have been focused on economic and social programs. These programs cannot be easily carried out in high military and security risk areas. The challenge for Japan today is to find ways of expanding its areas of operational coverage through close collaboration with the Afghan and international partners. Two possible areas of expansion can be foreseen. Currently, the northern provinces are relatively secure and await further development. JICA is ready and examining the possibility of expanding its rice cultivation to the north. If successful, such an attempt would vastly increase the production of food and might prove effective in forestalling the problem of increasing areas of opium cultivation.

On a longer time span planning, JICA is currently undertaking the mapping of a series of highway construction in the central Asian republics taking advantage of its soft loan usage. Many of these highways lead to Afghanistan, and would eventually contribute to the development of the entire central Asian region.

While focusing on the immediate challenges of confronting the security needs of Afghanistan, Japan will be ready to join in the development of a strategy that brings reconstruction and all other assistance together to gain the overall security and stability on the ground. The Afghan government and people will have to be brought closely into the process. It is their interest that we defend and their commitment that we need. 

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