

JAPAN

Party Portrait

Japan's current identity and security narratives were largely shaped during the post-World War II era. Its defeat to the US and the nuclear bombing in its territory continue to represent a national trauma, which resulted in public revulsion at militarism. Japan has thus evolved into an economic and a non-military great power. Its main interest lies in promoting an international system governed by economic interdependence and stable international institutions. The US-Japan alliance, which is rooted in a military agreement by which US provides a security umbrella in the volatile regional security of East Asia, makes Japan somewhat dependent on the US. Japan sees itself as politically distant from East Asia and geopolitically more closely aligned to the US. However, several factors have pushed Japan to incrementally transition from being an almost exclusively economic power to assume greater military capacity. First, Japan has faced stagnation in its economic growth since the 1990s. It has also faced an increasingly challenging security environment with China's increasingly bellicose behavior and North Korea's nuclear development.

Key Interests

- Maintain a good relationship with the GCC due to energy considerations
- Establish a foothold in Iran and Iraq
- Balance partnership with the US in developing new relationships with US adversaries in the region
- Prevent US from adopting measures that are considered by regional actors to be hostile or antagonizing
- Limit Chinese involvement in the Middle East & North Africa

Sources of Leverage

Economic - One of the big purchasers of the region's resources and growing economic interdependence with the GCC countries through mutually beneficial energy cooperation and legal frameworks. In addition, since the 1970s, Japan has become one of the top donors to the region, leveraging increasing soft power through consistent support and development assistance.

Military - Despite limits imposed on Japan's offensive activities by Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, Japan has nevertheless slowly expanded its military capacity in the region.

Regional Strategy

In order to secure energy resources, Japan tries to develop good relations with the Middle Eastern countries. With this objective, the Japanese government is attempting to build a more multi-layered relationship that includes politics, security, and culture. The Japanese government is actively involved in securing resources abroad by funding Japanese companies and has been promoting a number of infrastructure projects and joint investments in the GCC countries. Due to the dilemma it faces between the US and the Middle Eastern countries, Japan promotes diplomatic neutrality in the region's conflicts by balancing between the two. While Japan has more often closely aligned with the US in its Middle East strategy, it also has sought to maintain a policy that stands apart from the US to preserve its neutral stance. Japan also puts emphasis on non-coercive measures, humanitarian support, and economic development in its approach to Middle East conflicts and peace process.

Powerful Individuals

Prime Minister Shinzō Abe (President of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP); Normalist); Relatively weak leaders of opposition party including Renho Murata of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ).

Potential Negotiation Moves

Increase foreign direct investment (FDI) - In Middle East

Facilitate peace processes and reconciliation dialogues in the region

Support negotiated ceasefire in Syria conflict

Separate itself from US-led efforts to promote democracy and human rights, and perceived initiatives to "impose" Western values on the Middle East.

Internal Conflicts

Within Japan, four ideological groups exist with regards to Japan's involvement and the role of the JSDF in international conflicts, which directly affect Japan's Middle East policy: Pacifists (opposing all involvement in overseas conflicts), Mercantilists (prioritize economy over defense), Normalists (support deployment of troops overseas and normalization of JSDF), Nationalists (strong support of remilitarization).

Memberships

IAEA, OECD, UN (Security Council – term ends 2017)

Allies

UNITED STATES

Partners

BAHRAIN, DJIBOUTI, EGYPT Government, IRAN, JORDAN, KUWAIT, LEBANON Government, OMAN, QATAR, RUSSIA, SAUDI ARABIA, TURKEY, UAE, YEMEN Government, GCC, IRAN

Rivals

CHINA

Adversaries

ISIS

Active Armed Opponents

N/A

Proxy

N/A

External Sponsor

N/A

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

ALGERIA, EGYPT Government, IRAQ Government, JORDAN, LEBANON Government, LIBYA GNA, MOROCCO Government, PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY, SYRIA Government, TUNISIA, YEMEN Government