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Introduction

I would like to take this opportunity today to speak on three topics: the situation in Afghanistan, developments in Pakistan, and Japan’s policy toward Afghanistan. I will also include some policy suggestions with each of these.

1 . The current situation in Afghanistan

Recent years have seen a striking expansion of Taliban power in Afghanistan, and independent authoritative bodies that might well be termed “shadow governments” have been formed in 30 of the country’s 34 states. In fact, the situation differs greatly from that of the 1990s in that the Taliban have incited actions by Islamic fundamentalist groups across the region and that similar terrorist acts are being committed even in Central Asia and India.

However, this expansion of Taliban power relies more on oppression, fear and terror than on popular support, reflecting the Karzai government’s limited capacity to implement policy as well as reduced aid from overseas. In other words, adequately thwarting the resurgence of the Taliban depends on Western strategy. Today’s situation could be seen as the cumulative result of strategic blunders, including the cut in aid and the slowdown in economic reconstruction in the wake of the war in Iraq, the greater effort focused by the Bush administration on bringing down Al Qaeda than the Taliban, the provision of safe havens to the Taliban by Pakistan, and the adverse impact of hasty implementation of the peace process on domestic and international confidence.

The situation has continued to improve since the Obama administration came into office. In addition to an increase in the military forces deployed, noteworthy measures such as the adoption of a new counter-terrorism strategy aimed at winning hearts and minds through livelihood stabilization and efforts to boost interest in domestic economic development (especially in agriculture-related infrastructure) have been taken and are producing results. However, the announcement by the Obama administration of an early start to withdrawal (July 2011) has worsened the situation in Afghanistan, within which a deeply rooted ethnic

struggle is being fought, and concerns have arisen that Afghanistan will become an arena for a competition in influence among countries in the region. The minimum precondition for withdrawal will likely be the formation of a regional consensus on non-intervention in Afghanistan's internal affairs. There are a mountain of other difficult issues to be addressed – negotiations between the US and the Taliban, a break of the Taliban from Al Qaeda, etc. – but it is crucial in any case that the Afghan government participate in these processes as a key actor.

2. The current situation in Pakistan

The crisis confronting Pakistan at present is a composite one. On the political side, the Zardari civilian government established in September 2008 not only has strong tensions with the military but also faces problems pertaining to its own governance capabilities. Economically, the country is in a serious bind, with the global recession and the energy crisis compounding the scant regard given to investing in infrastructure, cultivating export industries and ensuring consumer protection under the Musharraf government. The nationwide expansion of terrorist actions by the "Pakistani Taliban movement" and unresolved ethnic and regional issues such as that of Balochistan have further destabilized the government, and externally relations with India have deteriorated over territorial rights in the Kashmir region, water resources, influence in Afghanistan and terrorist organizations.

There are two "strategic issues" that are key in seeking solutions to these problems.

The first is the issue of where Pakistan should look to discover its own national identity. With opinion split over such labels as "Muslim," "democratic," "ethnic group," and "anti-India," discussions are needed on "what makes us Pakistanis."

The second is the issue of what constitutes Pakistan's security paradigm. In Pakistan there is a mixture between the contradictory concepts of a "military paradigm" aimed at developing a wartime framework that keeps the country's rivalry with India foremost in mind, and a "civil society paradigm" emphasizing development, education, commerce, good-neighbor policies, and disarmament.

Seen from this perspective, it would seem especially important for Pakistan to build cooperative ties between the military and civilian leadership, to play a role in promoting (but not brokering) the peace process in Afghanistan, and to receive aid from the West in a form that contributes to economic development and the growth of civil society.

3. Japan's policy toward Afghanistan

Japan is Afghanistan's second largest donor after the US and the breadth of its aid coverage is noteworthy, e.g., the development of agricultural infrastructure to replace narcotic

cultivation, the formation of civil society and the creation of employment. In particular, the impressive ability of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to analyze needs, propose solutions and implement assistance efforts as well as the depth of interest in Afghanistan demonstrated by Sadako Ogata (JICA's current president) in Afghanistan are distinguishing characteristics of Japan's Afghanistan policy.

Naturally there are still problems that need to be overcome. Let me conclude my talk by touching on three of them.

First, there is still room for improvement in monitoring the use and assessment of the funds invested. Closer coordination should be pursued, with greater efforts made to ascertaining the actual state of corruption and graft, uncovering wasteful spending, and avoiding overlaps with aid provided by other countries.

Next, Japan has a major influence on, and still maintains relatively good relations with, the countries surrounding Afghanistan. Japan should take advantage of this position to help smooth the formation of a consensus among these countries.

Finally, in view of the sizable role that Japan is playing in Afghanistan and the surrounding region, most important in determining how it can exercise its influence is stimulating interest among the public at large. In this regard, it is essential that the Japanese public on the whole view the effective utilization of funds provided by Japan clearly to be in Japan's national interest.