

Current Situation in the Middle East and the New Regional Order

Research Group

1. Research overview

This Research Group will seek to analyze two issues that could have a major impact on Japan's security: (a) the future course of the new regional order in the Middle East and (b) radical Islamist activities and counter-terrorism measures.

(a) Analysis of the future course of the new regional order in the Middle East

The Middle East is now facing unprecedented turmoil and chaos. Globalization has made it possible, especially since the start of the 21st century, for individuals to circumvent the information control of national governments in obtaining and transmitting information, and inequalities in resource distribution and political participation (a lack of legitimacy in governance) have become generally and widely recognized. The result has been the emergence of both civil movements such as "the Arab Spring" and non-state entities such as Al-Qaeda and "Islamic State" that challenge the existing regional and international orders, rocking the very foundations of states in the Middle East. The US' "pivot to Asia" policy and its nuclear negotiations with Iran have heightened the concerns of traditionally pro-US countries in the Middle East (Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, etc.), and exposed the struggle for dominance among the major countries of the region. In that sense, envisaging the regional order that will ensue with the conclusion of the Iranian nuclear negotiations will be an important task connected with Japan's energy policy, which also encompasses the security of the Persian Gulf and other sea lanes. The primary objective of this Research Group will be to analyze the rapidly changing circumstances in the Middle East, ascertain the future of the regional order in the Middle East currently being reshaped by changes in the power balance, and indicating a direction for Japanese foreign policy in view of medium- and long-term trends.

(b) Analysis of radical Islamist activities and counter-terrorism measures

Another aim of the Research Group will be to collect and analyze information on radical Islamist activities in the Middle East and the Sahara region as well as in Europe and Asia. The Research Group will also endeavor to develop young experts in information analysis by holding workshops to translate and analyze information relating to radical Islamism. Furthermore, it will publish the results of these analyses online as they become available to provide a helpful reference for citizens and government officials traveling to the Middle East and Sahara region. Given that the negative legacies of colonial rule have been perpetuated and even exacerbated under post-independence authoritarian regimes, the Research Group will take a multifaceted approach in analyzing from a longer-term perspective the demographics excluded from fair distribution of resources and opportunities for political participation and will seek to devise solutions that address the possibility that these excluded groups will be drawn into terrorist activities and other efforts aimed at upsetting the existing order unless their societies can be rejuvenated through greater development and political participation nationwide.

2. Research Group structure

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