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Aid must foster self-responsibility

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What should Japan's international contribution and foreign aid program be in the 21st century? Let's take Japan's role in Afghanistan as a case study.

In the first Gulf War in 1991, Japan contributed as much as \$13 billion; however, Japan was ironically castigated for making only a monetary contribution to the war without making a military contribution in any significant way. When Kuwait posted a list of 30 countries that helped liberate Kuwait in the Washington Post, it did not include Japan. Japan contributed most of the war cost, but received virtually no international appreciation at all.

This bitter and frustrating experience has provided the Japanese people with a so-called "Gulf War syndrome." Japan should be willing to make a military and other visible contribution if necessary in order to acquire a respectable status in the international community.

When the United States launched an attack against the Taliban in Afghanistan in October 2001, Japan lost no time in moving to overcome this syndrome. In late October of that year, in order to make it possible for Japan to provide logistical support for U.S. military operations, the Diet enacted special anti-terrorism legislation that contained a built-in expiration period of two years. Then in November, the Japanese government used the new anti-terrorism law as the basis for its decision to dispatch a Maritime Self-Defense Force Aegis-equipped destroyer to the Indian Ocean to support U.S.-led antiterrorism operations.

The "Gulf War syndrome" provided Japan with a false sense of international affairs. Japan's basic assumption is wrong that the military contribution to Afghanistan is highly thought of in the world community. Japan placed top priority on the way to use its self-defense forces. The Diet wrongly believed that the decision whether Japan should dispatch its military forces or not was the most pressing problem in the world. No country expected Japan to play such a role. It was Japan's fundamental anachronistic perception of the times that the military presence was the world's index for evaluation.

Because Japan's behavior in the Afghanistan war and reconstruction clearly demonstrated that Japan was America's close ally, it became extremely difficult to play a peace-loving role in contributing to the international community in the humanitarian field. It is indispensable to be neutral and nonpartisan in order to play a humanitarian role in the world.

Not only in "international (military) contribution" but also in foreign economic aid did Japan seek to demonstrate its presence. In January 2002, the International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan was held in Tokyo co-chaired by the United States, EU, Saudi Arabia and Japan. Ministers and representatives of 61 nations and 21 international organizations attended the conference. Participants pledged more than \$1.8 billion for 2002 and over \$4.5 billion for a cumulative total. The EU pledged the largest amount (approximately \$500 million in 2002), followed by the United States (approximately \$290

million in 2002), followed by Japan pledging up to \$500 million over 2.5 years (\$250 million in 2002), and Saudi Arabia (approximately \$220 million over three years).

It is a general trend that Japan would help Afghanistan both for humanitarian and political reasons. This sounds quite generous, but we may be doing others harm. We mistakenly believe that we will be able to build a new nation by infusing a large amount of aid money. What is worse, we are do-gooders: We are so optimistic to misjudge that we are doing something good to Afghanistan. We are likely to neglect the fact that we have been spoiling Afghans and depriving them of acquiring opportunities for genuine independence.

When the cold war came to an end, both the Soviet Union and the United States left Afghanistan. It is said that Afghanistan was an abandoned and forgotten country in the post-cold war era as if it were good for the country to be tied hand and foot by the superpowers and their allies. On the contrary, Afghanistan had a golden opportunity to stand on its own feet for the first time in 35 years. Instead, Mujahedeen fighters were preoccupied with power struggles.

The world, including Japan, has been providing enormous amount of assistance to Afghanistan since the end of World War II, but Afghanistan could not establish a stable and firm government to make the best use of this assistance. Afghans are addicted to receiving foreign assistance.

Helping Afghans to stand on their feet should be a goal of all the assistance. Instead of giving \$500 million to remove mines, the world community should teach Afghans how to dispose of mines. No matter how long it may take, let Afghans remove these mines. Instead of building schools, hospitals, and highways, Japan has human resources and know-how to train teachers, doctors and civil engineers.

The Japanese government must understand that there are limits to what Japan can do. No matter how much assistance we may provide, success or failure of the assistance can be determined by the will and abilities of the recipient country. Unless Afghans stop their internal disputes, let the past drift away with the water, cooperate among themselves, and work in complete solidarity among themselves toward the reconstruction of their own country, Japanese assistance go into the drain.

In conclusion, the international community has been giving too much assistance to Afghanistan. Because of the excessive and needless meddling, Afghans have been getting too used to receiving assistance. They have been fighting among themselves and relying on foreign assistance instead of uniting to pursue a developmental path. Afghans cannot gain genuine independence without moderating foreign influence and manipulation.

Japan should reduce its direct financial assistance, because such assistance would increase Afghanistan's dependency. Rather, Japan should provide Afghans with human resources, knowledge, technical know-how, and other non-material assistance to help Afghanistan to become self-reliant.

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