

Seminar on “Japan’s Africa Policy: From TICAD to PKO”

Rie Takezawa, International Institute for Peace and Security

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Discussants:

Rie Takezawa, Researcher, International Institute for Peace and Security

Yuki Tatsumi (Moderator), Senior Associate, East Asia Program, Stimson Center

Website:

<https://www.stimson.org/content/japan-africa-policy-ticad-pko>

The Stimson Center hosted a seminar featuring Rie Takezawa, a Researcher at the International Institute for Peace and Security, to discuss her ongoing research on Japan’s policy towards Africa. Yuki Tatsumi, Senior Associate of the East Asia Program, introduced Takezawa and moderated the extensive question-and-answer session.

Takezawa began with a brief discussion of her research findings so far. She noted that though Africa is geographically distant from Japan, in recent decades the Japanese have engaged with Africa in several ways, including official development assistance (ODA), trade, and peacekeeping operations (PKO). In examining Japan’s peacebuilding activities in Africa, Takezawa traced the development of Japan’s policy on the continent, which evolved from a general stance on development with the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) to a more refined policy of economic development as a means of promoting stability and sustainable peace, under the concept of “quality growth.” Takezawa noted that Japan’s constitutional restrictions on its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) were a key factor in the movement towards economic tools for peacebuilding. Until recently, the Japanese government did not use terms like “peacebuilding” to describe its policy, because of the connotation of using military forces. Today, however, Japanese peacebuilding efforts in African countries span a wide array of activities and sectors, and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which directs ODA projects, considers peacebuilding and conventional development assistance to share the same objectives. Takezawa described this approach as Japan’s unique style of peacebuilding, but also noted that because so many types of activities are considered peacebuilding efforts, the policy itself is too vague.

Takezawa discussed Japan’s activities in South Sudan as a case study. The SDF has deployed an engineering unit to South Sudan as part of a United Nations PKO mission. JICA is also conducting ODA projects in South Sudan, so the engineering unit has collaborated with JICA on infrastructure projects, including road construction, which contributes to civilian protection without requiring use of coercive force. Takezawa emphasized that this type of collaboration maximizes Japan’s peacebuilding capacity, but such coordination is not well organized at the policy level. Instead, it is often planned in the field.

Takezawa closed with recommendations for Japan to improve its policy formulation and implementation. First, she recommended that the Japanese government clarify its policy towards Africa in terms of means and objectives. Second, she supported the development of an “all-Japan” approach, which would maximize Japan’s positive impact by drawing on different types of organizations. Third, she

suggested that the Japanese private sector expand its operations in African countries to promote economic development.

Tatsumi invited the audience to ask questions, and an in-depth discussion of Takezawa's research topic ensued. Doug Brooks, from the International Stability Operations Association, asked about what would happen if the SDF engineering unit in South Sudan was caught in a conflict. Takezawa replied that the unit would likely remain in South Sudan, but that their presence would be impacted by political will in Japan to keep them there. Tatsumi added that this issue was an ongoing debate in the Diet, as well as the Ministry of Defense.

Ambassador David Shinn, from George Washington University, asked about the role the Japanese military base in Djibouti plays in Japan's Africa policy. Takezawa said that Japan's mission in Djibouti is primarily anti-piracy, an effort Japan is pursuing with other countries and which shows Japan's attempt to improve its international cooperation. Shinn noted that there have been no successful pirate attacks in several years. Takezawa confirmed that the Djibouti base will serve purposes other than anti-piracy in the future, since the Diet is discussing using the base to evacuate Japanese nationals in emergencies.

Ellen Frost, from the East-West Center and Relief International, asked about the extent to which competition with China drives Japan's policy towards Africa, and whether Japanese nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Africa operate in cooperation with the government. Takezawa said that Japanese NGOs prefer not to work with the government and are also cautious of SDF collaboration. Regarding China, Takezawa replied that Japan is conscious of China's increasing engagement in Africa, and is trying to emphasize its own strengths, in particular quality growth, in relation to China's. She noted that Japan's interest in Africa is not solely because China is also there, but because Japan has genuine interest in the region.

Leon Weintraub, retired from the U.S. foreign service, commented on the definition of peacebuilding being so broad that it did not have the characteristics of peacebuilding he expected, such as training engineering units. Takezawa acknowledged that her definition of peacebuilding was broad and that Japan's broad contributions to peacebuilding, due to limitations on the SDF, was one of the points of her research. She asserted that economic development that promotes stability is a foundation of peacebuilding, but also noted that the recent revision of Japan's ODA charter will allow Japan to provide training in the military sector in the future.

Mary Francis, from the Department of Labor, asked whether Japan was doing something similar to the U.S. trade preference program African Growth and Opportunity Act, which encourages American private sector growth in Africa while also adhering to international labor standards. Takezawa replied that Japan focuses on long-term development assistance, which requires coordination with the government, and is also cognizant of how governance in African countries relates to economic development.

Elor Nkereuwem, a visiting fellow at the Stimson Center and Ph.D. candidate at Johns Hopkins University SAIS, challenged the feasibility of encouraging Japanese private sector companies to operate in African countries where the state is weak or has legitimacy issues. Takezawa said that her recommendation includes states that are stable but have a risk of conflict, and that Japan's genuine interest in promoting stability through economic development indicates that the efforts to boost private sector operations will likely be sustainable. Frost asked for further clarification on the distinction between governance and economic development, since foreign economic development in African dictatorships has a track record of increasing inequality. Takezawa acknowledged the inequality problem and that Japan must be careful

in this regard, and she posited two reasons for Japan's private sector activities in Africa: local job creation and capacity development.

Several audience members asked about Japan's ODA in Africa and whether it was tied to political interests or certain conditions. Takezawa noted that sometimes Japanese aid is criticized as being tied.

The discussion moved onto Japanese public sentiment about dispatch of the SDF. Hideaki Tonooka, who worked for the Japanese government on peacekeeping policy in the past, asked whether there was currently an advocate within the Japanese government who could champion Japan's engagement in Africa and encourage its expansion. Takezawa did not know of such a person in the Japanese government, but said that the revisions to the ODA charter and security legislation were indicators that the Japanese government wants to support its Africa policy seriously.

Kenji Kamesato, from Marubeni America, noted the riskiness of operating in unstable African countries and asked about the concept of an "all Japan" approach to engagement. Takezawa replied that "all Japan" refers not only to coordination among government ministries, but also collaboration with NGOs and private sector companies. She also noted in response to a follow-up question that there was the potential for the approach to conflict with bidding requirements for development.

David Stern, retired from the U.S. foreign service, asked about drivers of Japan's interest in Africa, noting that Japan seems to focus on working with the U.N. while other countries, including the U.S., work outside of the U.N. as well. He also asked about the possibility of Japan-China collaboration in Africa. Takezawa replied that Japan's interests in Africa included natural resources, building relationships with African countries that might support Japan's bid for U.N. Security Council membership, as well as increasing Japan's contribution to international peace efforts. She said there were no Japan-China cooperative efforts yet, but both Japan and China worked on anti-piracy missions out of Djibouti. In response to a question from Tatsumi about how Japan promotes the "inclusiveness" aspect of quality growth, Takezawa also noted that if Japanese organizations clarify their interests in Africa, they will be better able to promote quality growth.

Richard Ponzio, from Stimson, asked about the decision to hold the most recent TICAD in Africa rather than Asia, as well as about efforts to train the new peacebuilders through the Hiroshima Peacebuilding Center. Takezawa replied that Japan is conscious of China's engagement in Africa, but that she did not view their relationship in Africa as competitive, since Japan has genuine interest in the region. Takezawa also said that the initiative to train new peacebuilders had not yet reached its full potential, and that educating peacebuilders was an important point Japan needed to address in forums such as TICAD.

Soppi Ngoule, a journalist, asked about Japan's involvement in efforts to combat Boko Haram and the overall structure of Japan's Africa policy. Takezawa replied that Japan does not have any projects related to Boko Haram, due to SDF limitations on military force outside Japan, but does work on security development in Nigeria, such as by helping people to avoid joining such groups. Takezawa described the main pillar of Japan's policy as official development assistance, provided through loans, grants, and training.

Frost asked about the potential for U.S.-Japan cooperation in aid programs, which faces bureaucratic obstacles in the U.S. Takezawa stated that there was field-level cooperation, but managing higher level coordination was more difficult.

Tatsumi thanked the audience for their attendance and the discussion, and closed the seminar.