

Study Group on the Future of
Japan's International Peace Cooperation
-Summary of Discussion-

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Secretariat of the International Peace Cooperation
Headquarters, Cabinet Office of Japan

I Background and Purpose

On June 1992, Japan enacted the Act on Cooperation with UN Peacekeeping Operations and Other Operations (Act No. 79 of 1992; hereafter referred to as the “International Peace Cooperation Law”) to take a more active role in promoting international peace. Since then, under the framework of this law, Japan has made both personnel and in-kind contributions in support of international peace efforts, particularly those led by the United Nations (UN). To date, Japan has dispatched approximately 12,700 personnel across 29 international peace cooperation missions and has carried out 32 in-kind contributions. Currently, Japan continues to dispatch staff officers to the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS), one of the United Nations peacekeeping operations (UNPKOs), as well as to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), a non-UNPKO mission that monitors the ceasefire between Egypt and Israel and promotes dialogue and confidence-building between the two countries.

Since the end of the Cold War, UNPKOs have faced a growing number of challenges as their missions have diversified in response to shifts in the international landscape, particularly the evolving nature of armed conflicts. Today, the environment surrounding UNPKOs has become increasingly complex and demanding, due to factors such as divisions of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), heightened geopolitical rivalry, and emerging threats posed by new technologies such as drones and artificial intelligence (AI). Against this backdrop, the “Pact for the Future”, adopted at the “Summit of the Future” in September 2024, reaffirmed that UN peace operations, including UNPKOs, remain vital instruments for maintaining international peace and security. In November of the same year, at the request from the co-chairs of the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial Process including Germany, the UN Department of Peace Operations commissioned an independent study entitled “The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities”, tasking external experts with helping to shape the agenda for the ministerial meeting held in Berlin in May 2025. At the Ministerial, participants underscored that UNPKOs continue to serve as a unique mechanism for preventing, managing and containing armed conflict, offering a blend of extensive experience, international legitimacy, and cost-effectiveness, while enabling effective multilateral burden-sharing.

Taking into consideration Japan's accumulated contributions in international peace cooperation, recent shifts in the global landscape including the evolving nature of international conflicts, ongoing international discussions on the future of international peace cooperation,

and the current implementation framework under the existing International Peace Cooperation Law, the Secretariat convened a study group to broadly gather expert opinions on the future of Japan's international peace cooperation. The group met over three sessions: Session 1 on March 28, Session 2 on April 30, and Session 3 on May 30, 2025).

Members of the Study Group are as follows;

- KIHARA-HUNT Ai, Professor, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, University of Tokyo, the chairperson of the study group
- INOUE Mika, Professor, Faculty of Global Communication, Toyo Gakuen University
- SAKANE Koji, Professor, International Center, Shimane University, former Director of the Sudan Office and the Peacebuilding Division, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)
- NACKEN Ritsu, Chief of Mission, International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Japan
- NISHIDA Ippeita, Senior Research Fellow, Sasakawa Peace Foundation
- MATSUMURA Goro, International Security Analyst, Former Commandant, Tohoku Army, Japan Ground Self-Defense Force

II Summary of Discussion

The experts participating in this study group expressed a wide range of views on the following 11 key issues. Their main opinions are summarized below.

1. The Significance of Japan's Contribution to International Peace Efforts

- (1) Contributing to international efforts for peace is essential for safeguarding both Japan's own security and that of the international community. It also serves to protect Japan's own national interests. Establishing a domestic foundation for international peace cooperation contributes to building international trust in Japan and strengthening Japan's capacity for effective information gathering. While Japan's participation was once justified on the basis of its moral responsibility as the world's second-largest economy, economic power is not a basis for considering such contributions today.
- (2) International peace cooperation fosters interdependence. Given Japan's limited natural resources and its shift toward a middle-power status, greater interdependence is inevitable. For Japan to survive in this context, it is crucial to uphold and restore an international order based on the rule of law. A decline in economic power does not diminish the need for international contributions, on the contrary, it makes them even more vital.
- (3) Participation in international peace efforts helps maintain Japan's presence and voice in international politics. Although Japan's relative national power and influence may be in decline, it is important to strategically sustain and expand its international role. Japan must engage in shaping global norms and actively participate in the decision-making of international organizations.
- (4) As a member of the United Nations, Japan's continued contribution to UNPKOs should be regarded as a given; withdrawing from such efforts would be a strategic risk. Japan's involvement signals its commitment to upholding the international order. UNPKOs were originally established as highly political mechanisms designed to operate with limited resources. Although new UNPKO missions have not been launched since 2014, there are no plans to dismantle the framework, which remains necessary. For Japan, a functioning multilateral system, especially the UN, is indispensable. At the same time, it is important for Japan to diversify its multilateral engagements and pursue partnerships with regional organizations, other international institutions, and civil society organizations. In other words, Japan should maintain a diverse range of security options while supporting the UN. In the absence of a robust security architecture in Asia, Japan's participation in UNPKOs offers a valuable and viable alternative.

- (5) Through its contribution to international efforts for peace, Japan can demonstrate its firm commitment to maintaining the international order. It is important to clearly articulate Japan's involvement and stance on regional and global security, which will also help shape Japan's image as a proponent of "human security" and "non-military engagement". Japan's soft power and, international, and high levels of trust are rooted in its long-standing engagement in ODA and PKO activities.
- (6) Engagement in international peace efforts supports the operational readiness of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and enhances their understanding of regional dynamics. Such missions provide frontline opportunities to address emerging challenges, including drone warfare, mis/disinformation, and other hybrid threats. Furthermore, they strengthen the SDF's ability to cooperate in multilateral frameworks and deepen Japan's capacity for meaningful participation in the international community. Given the recent growth in international activities by the SDF, such as training exercises with like-minded countries, have increased significantly. Therefore, it is necessary to consider these activities not only as part of peace cooperation but also as part of a broader strategy for defense and security collaboration.

2. Japan's Policy Position and Selling Points

- (1) Japan's integrity as a country that consistently fulfills its assessed contributions to UN is a key strength in the international community. Moreover, Japan is widely regarded as a reliable and stable actor, underpinned by its political and policy continuity.
- (2) Japan's indispensable partners for future peace cooperation are the Global South and the European Union (EU). Japan can play a constructive role in complementing regional initiatives led by organizations such as the African Union (AU), the EU, and others. In light of its regional security environment, Japan should also consider deepening ties with advanced countries that serve as de facto strategic partners or "quasi-allies."
- (3) The National Security Strategy of Japan 2022 states that, "the international peace cooperation that Japan has long contributed in order to promote peace and stability in the international community, fosters cooperation with other Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs), and helps to develop Japan's human resources." Stemming from this strategy, Japan should pursue closer cooperation with TCCs through bilateral engagement or defense partnerships.
- (4) The Triangular Partnership Programme (UNTPP), while not always highly visible, remains one of Japan's signature contributions and should be sustained in a steady and consistent manner. Strengthening ties with the UN Secretariat in this context would also be desirable.
- (5) Among troop/police-contributing countries (T/PCCs), funders, hosts, or idea generators,

Japan should aspire to be recognized as a country that proposes forward-looking ideas and initiatives. To this end, increasing the number of Japanese senior officials in international organizations is essential. Currently, there are no Japanese staff in key decision-making positions within the UN Secretariat, and Japanese staff remain underrepresented in peacekeeping-related deliberations.

3. Strategic Reforms of Japan's Involvement in International Peace Efforts

(1) Peace operations should be positioned within a broader vision of peacebuilding. Future policies should align with the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus framework promoted by the Japanese government. A long-term perspective is also essential. The core of peacebuilding lies in ending ongoing conflicts and fostering nations and systems that are resilient to future conflicts. Rather than focusing solely on what is feasible within the current system, strategic thinking must be applied to building future-oriented frameworks conducive to lasting peace. Given the limited resources, it is equally important to identify what not to pursue.

(2) Japan's contributions to international peace remain insufficiently recognized due to limited public outreach. It is essential to communicate Japan's initiatives more effectively to the global audience and to enhance their visibility. Public engagement should focus on explaining the strategic significance of these efforts and shaping informed public opinion through proactive and diversified public relations strategies.

(3) Specific proposals for reforming Japan's approach include the following:

- Strengthen linkages between Asia and Africa. Support should be designed not only along regional lines but also with a view to fostering interregional cooperation.
- Prepare for increased engagement in non-UN-led missions. As such requests are expected to rise, Japan should explore the feasibility of participation through policy simulations and structured analysis.
- Promote a whole-of-Japan approach, including Track 2 actors. Support should not be limited to government initiatives, but should also draw on contributions from the private sector, academia, and civil society.
- Advance Japan's humanitarian values. Under the banner of building a government that prioritizes humanitarian policies for its people, Japan should actively champion fundamental rights, including the right to life, ethnicity, religion, and gender equality. The humanitarian domain is an area in which Japan can take a proactive leadership role.

4. International Peace Efforts and Peace-Related Activities in which Japan should Engage

- (1) Japan's continued contribution to UNPKOs remains important for maintaining relations with UNPKO. As a country transitioning into a middle-power status and fulfilling a substantial share of the UN's assessed contributions, Japan should take a leading role in related discussions and offer strategic insights. It may be worthwhile to study the approaches of other countries that focus their contributions on budget-conscious areas or sectors in which they hold comparative advantages.
- (2) Given the current challenges surrounding potential expansions to Japan's participation in UNPKOs, the country should actively explore engagement in peace-related activities under the framework of international humanitarian relief operations, especially those carried out based on UN resolutions or at the requests of international organizations.
- (3) Japan should pursue cooperation with the EU, which conducts peace activities on a scale second only to the UN. The EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) missions have incorporated advanced technologies from an early stage, and collaboration in this area would provide Japan with valuable operational insights. Furthermore, since CSDP participants are NATO members and adhere to NATO standards, such cooperation could also facilitate indirect engagement with NATO frameworks.
- (4) With regard to non-UN-led peace operations, supporting AU presents a viable option. This would first require securing reliable partner countries. Continued support for sub-regional organizations such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is also important. In this context, regional experts will play a key role. Japan could also enhance its contributions through support for training initiatives, such as assistance to peace operations training institutions.
- (5) From a sectoral perspective, maritime security is an area in which Japan has notable expertise. Providing support in this field is essential for coastal nations.

5. Strategic Personnel Deployment, Deployment Support, and Human Resource Development

- (1) There are numerous sites of international peace operations. Even the presence of a single Japanese staff member in a mission can significantly enhance Japan's visibility, strengthen networks, and improve information-gathering capabilities. It is important to ensure the placement of at least one representative in each key strategic location.
- (2) In international peace operations, not only SDF but also civilians can play vital roles. This may be considered as a viable second career path for retired SDF personnel.
- (3) Deploying Japanese personnel to peace operation missions contributes meaningfully to

Japan's relationships with the UN and the AU. Diplomatically, such deployments support the “peace and stability” objectives outlined by Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). For example, the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe (RSCE) in Uganda, serves as a logistics hub for several missions in Africa, where information is concentrated, and as a training site for the UNTPP, making it a valuable option for Japanese engagement.

- (4) Such deployments also foster personal relationships with senior officials in relevant countries, deepen understanding of regional contexts, and provide foundational insight for future initiatives. For instance, the British Peace Support Team (BPST), which supports capacity building across Africa and is active at the peace operations training institution in Kenya, could enhance Japan-UK cooperation, Japan-UK-Kenya cooperation, and Japan-UK-Africa cooperation.
- (5) Dispatching personnel is not only about the individual contributions they make, but also about building Japan's institutional capacity and human resources to engage proactively. It is also about cultivating individuals who possess an understanding of the realities on the ground. To achieve this, such efforts must be continuous and sustained over time.
- (6) The number of Japanese professionals in international organizations, including at the UN Headquarters, should be increased. Regional experts constitute a distinct strength for Japan. Japan has regional experts with deep knowledge of local languages, cultures, and political contexts, both in the public and private sectors. Additionally, Japan has a growing number of NGOs and private organizations with specialized expertise. Leveraging these resources strategically, including through the creation of a database of private-sector experts by specialization and technical field, would be beneficial.
- (7) Media coverage of Japan's international contributions has declined, and interest among younger generations appears to be waning. Even among those interested, there are concerns about the stability of careers in this field. It is therefore important to make career paths in international peace cooperation more visible and viable.
- (8) The scheme of International Peace Cooperation Program Advisors has proven meaningful, with many participants subsequently engaging in academic and policy work. Providing opportunities for short-term assignments at overseas institutions would enhance the scheme's attractiveness by offering hands-on experience and networking opportunities. Moreover, introducing a new program to recruit mid-career professionals with specialized expertise on a fixed-term basis to engage in practice could be meaningful.

6. In-kind Contributions

- (1) The UN has an idea of the Equipment Contribution Country (ECC) initiative. However rather than waiting for the initiative to mature, Japan should proactively seize opportunities to provide in-kind contributions to countries that dispatch personnel to peace operations, UNPKO or non-UN-led missions, by offering targeted assistance where appropriate.
- (2) In the field of international humanitarian relief, the global trend has shifted toward cash-based assistance rather than in-kind contributions. Cash transfers allows affected individuals to choose the goods they need by themselves, are considered a more dignified form of aid, and are also highly cost-effective. Consequently, they have gained increasing attention in discussions on addressing funding crises. Nevertheless, in order for in-kind contributions remain effective for humanitarian relief, it is necessary to standardize material specifications in accordance with the UN standards. It is also important to work closely with organizations such as the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM), which possess extensive expertise in humanitarian logistics, particularly during the procurement phase. Furthermore, while support from the Cabinet Office of Japan requires a cabinet decision and is procedurally time-consuming, thus limiting the frequency of contributions, the volume of supplies per contributions should be increased to align with international expectations and standards.
- (3) Humanitarian relief supplies under the International Peace Cooperation Law and emergency aid supplies under the JICA Law are stored separately by the Cabinet Office and JICA, despite being largely identical. From the standpoint of cost-efficiency, consolidating these stockpiles would be a rational step.
- (4) When implementing in-kind contributions, it is important to do so in a visible and recognizable manner, for example, by using SDF aircraft to transport supplies. Enhanced cooperation with Japanese companies is also desirable. Japanese-made products enjoy a strong reputation for quality, and there have been local calls for greater engagement with Japanese private companies. In humanitarian emergencies, it would also be beneficial to not only fund the distribution of supplies, but also contribute to the replenishment of stockpiles held by international organizations.

7. Election Observation

Election observation is a highly effective activity, as the necessary expertise and operational know-how have already been accumulated within implementing agencies. This enables even relatively inexperienced young personnel to participate meaningfully. When opportunities arise, election observation remains a worthwhile area for engagement. Although it is no longer a core component within the framework of UNPKOs, cooperation with non-UN entities such as the EU and the AU may be valuable when appropriate. There is also potential to integrate election observation with broader initiatives, including IT-based support, counter-disinformation measures, governance assistance, and electoral system strengthening.

8. Contributions to Strategic Planning at the UN and Other Relevant Organizations

(1) Strategic planning for UNPKOs requires personnel with advanced expertise. It would be beneficial for Japan to provide such individuals where possible. If direct dispatch proves difficult, collaboration with countries such as Indonesia and Cambodia, both of which have experience hosting UNPKO missions and play influential roles in the Asian region, could be a practical alternative. In terms of human resources, experts with a deep knowledge of regional cultures, languages, and political contexts are well suited to contribute effectively. Additionally, it would be desirable for Japan to explore ways to contribute to enhanced planning efforts, including through capacity-building support, by drawing on the strengths of its police in community engagement through the *koban* system. With regard to thematic areas, Japan's comparative strength lies in its humanitarian contributions. It is therefore advisable to continue promoting strategic input grounded in humanitarian perspectives.

(2) Concerning peace missions led by the AU, a regional organization outside the UN framework, there is a clear need to support to pre-deployment field assessments, which appear to be less systematically conducted than those for UNPKOs. Supporting such investigative work would help strengthen mission planning and effectiveness.

9. Contributions to Training Programs

(1) Under the Official Security Assistance (OSA) framework, of which international peace cooperation is one of the three core pillars, the provision of heavy machinery and equipment

to host countries and TCCs via the UNTPP is possible. To maintain its leadership role in the UNTPP, which Japan has held since its inception, the strategic use of OSA should be proactively pursued. Providing heavy machinery to peace operations training institutions in UNTPP training host countries through OSA would also serve to strengthen bilateral relationships with countries in Southeast Asia and East Africa that Japan deems important. Although Japan has led the UNTPP since its inception, its recent absence from mission deployments has led to a gradual erosion of the SDF practical expertise. South Korea, now a recent participant in the UNTPP, has begun supplying equipment to training host countries.

- (2) The UNTPP has recently expanded to include training for peace support operations (PSO) conducted by the AU. Although these trainings are based on UN standards, differences remain between UN and AU standards in areas such as evaluation and management. Accordingly, support to help bridge these gaps should be considered.
- (3) It is important to provide comprehensive training for functions essential to PKO missions, not only technical training in heavy machinery operations thorough the UNTPP. The SDF possess considerable expertise in this area and could contribute by inviting foreign trainees to Japan and dispatching Japanese instructors and training supervisors abroad. In addition, drawing on the experience of police personnel, not just the SDF, would further broaden Japan's training contributions to the UNTPP. The specialized knowledge of regional experts, including academics and NGO personnel, should also be utilized. In light of the current discussions on staff downsizing at the UN, the potential utilization of such personnel could also be explored.
- (4) It is important to identify core thematic areas for training. For example, support for youth, an area in which few other countries are currently active, could enhance Japan's international visibility. Joint training exercises could also be considered as a way for Japan to gain frontline insights into areas of interest, such as counter-drone measures.

10. Strategic Communications and Outreach

- (1) Public outreach related to international peace cooperation should be approached with an understanding that there are three primary target audiences: the global community, the Japanese public, and the local beneficiaries. The appropriate content and media differ depending on the audience. Global outreach refers to external communications aimed at foreign countries and the international community. Domestic outreach targets the Japanese public, while beneficiary outreach focuses on local populations such as in host countries of

PKO missions.

- (2) Regarding domestic outreach, the segment of the Japanese population interested in international affairs and the UN remains relatively small. Therefore, outreach aimed at the general public is essential. Young people are a particularly promising audience and should be targeted using content, platforms, and formats that resonate with them. Communicating compelling stories, such as tangible humanitarian outcomes achieved through international peace cooperation or changes on the ground brought about by technological advancements, can foster greater public understanding and support.
- (3) A whole-of-Japan approach should be adopted, enhancing inter-ministerial coordination and promoting collaboration with international organizations, other countries, and universities. One example would be engaging youth through mock missions or simulated election observations at universities or high schools to increase interest in international peace cooperation.
- (4) To strengthen public outreach, increased investment by the Cabinet Office is also advisable.

11. Strengthening Coordination

- (1) Stronger integration between international peace cooperation and security policy must be considered. Achieving peace requires not only halting or deterring conflict through military means but also stopping and preventing conflict through mediation and negotiation. The coordination of diplomatic efforts with defense cooperation is therefore essential.
- (2) Although Japan's dispatch of SDF to international peace cooperation activities has declined, this is largely due to a shift in deployment focus toward defense cooperation. From a broader perspective, Japan's overall international deployments have increased. In light of this, enhanced interagency coordination is needed. Within the UN, as the focus may continue to shift from PKOs to political missions, it is crucial for Japan to maintain the flexibility to respond accordingly.