YSU Journal of International Affairs
2026, Vol. 2, No. 2, 40-60
https://doi.org/10.46991/jia.2026.2.2.040

YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING HOUSE

JAPAN'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

TADASHI IWAMI[*]
PhD in Politics, Lecturer
Modern Japanese Studies Program, Hokkaido University, Japan
ROUBEN AZIZIAN[**]
PhD in International Relations, Honorary Professor
Centre for Defence and Security Studies, Massey University, New Zealand

Abstract

This paper analyzes the evolution of Japan's foreign policy toward the South Caucasus region since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It argues that Japan's regional engagement has evolved through four phases: ad hoc humanitarian assistance (1991–1996); the resource-driven pivot of Hashimoto's Eurasian Diplomacy (1997–2005); the values-based framing of Asō's Arc of Freedom and Prosperity (2006–2017); and Kōno's Caucasus Initiative (2018–present), which frames the South Caucasus as a transport "linchpin" and "gateway" connecting Asia and Europe within the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision. Drawing on Diplomatic Bluebooks and official development assistance (ODA) records, the article maps this trajectory onto a two-by-two matrix of rhetoric and substantive action. While Tokyo's rhetoric has become regional and geostrategic, its actions have remained bilateral: energy-centric loans in Azerbaijan, connectivity infrastructure in Georgia, and capacity building in Armenia. This gap is institutional rather than a question of political will. The article asks whether the Takaichi administration's economic security agenda can close this gap or leave engagement with the region governed by inherited bilateral instruments.

Keywords: *South Caucasus, Japanese foreign policy, ODA, economic security.*

[*] Tadashi Iwami is a lecturer at Hokkaido University, Japan, and coordinator of its Modern Japanese Studies Program. He holds a PhD in Politics from the University of Otago. His research focuses on Japan's foreign and security policy, international relations in the Indo-Pacific, and the Japan–New Zealand strategic partnership.
Email: tadashi.iwami@elms.hokudai.ac.jp ORCID iD: 0000-0001-8478-5260
** Rouben Azizian is an honorary professor and former director of the Centre for Defence and Security Studies at Massey University, New Zealand. He holds a PhD in International Relations. His research interests include Asia-Pacific security, diplomacy and conflict resolution, security sector governance, and post-Soviet politics.
Email: r.azizian@massey.ac.nz ORCID iD: 0009-0009-4671-482X

Received: 29.08.2026
Revised: 13.10.2026
Accepted: 28.10.2026

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Introduction

Japan experienced a historic turning point in its domestic politics in October 2025. Sanae Takaichi, the president of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), was elected Japan's first female prime minister. In the general election in February 2026, the LDP won 316 of the 465 seats in the House of Representatives. It was the first time in Japan's postwar history that a single party had secured a two-thirds majority on its own. Following this victory, Takaichi formed her second cabinet the same month, reappointing every minister. In foreign and security policy, Takaichi's posture closely aligns with the legacy of the late Prime Minister Shinzō Abe. She takes a hardline stance on national security and Japan's defense capabilities in its immediate neighborhood while continuing to collaborate with other like-minded nations to sustain peace and security globally.

To counter threats from China, Russia, and North Korea, all of which jeopardize Japan's national security in East Asia, Takaichi has opted to enhance Japan's military capabilities both institutionally, by revising existing defense-related policy documents, and practically. In her first policy address in October 2025, she announced that the target of raising defense-related spending to two percent of GDP, previously set for fiscal 2027, would be met in fiscal 2025. This target was reached through the supplementary budget enacted in December 2025.[1] The Takaichi administration is currently reviewing three core security documents and expects to release them at the end of 2026.

Takaichi has also made economic security a signature priority—a natural extension of her tenure as minister of state for economic security under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida between August 2022 and October 2024. The portfolio itself was created in October 2021 and first held by Takayuki Kobayashi. Takaichi succeeded him in the cabinet reshuffle of August 2022 and held the post for over two years, longer than any other incumbent to date.

Takaichi's emphasis on economic security has elevated the position of the South Caucasus region. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the route running from Central Asia through the Caspian Sea and the South Caucasus to Europe has gained importance as an economic corridor that can bypass Russia. For Japan under Takaichi, this route can provide supply chain resilience, helping to ensure its economic security.

However, Japan's relationship with the South Caucasus region remains conspicuously underexplored. Some existing literature predates both the Caucasus Initiative announced in 2018 by then Foreign Minister Tarō Kōno and the Russian invasion in 2022.[2] This article updates the literature and argues that Japan's rheto-

[1] Sanae Takaichi, "Press Conference by Prime Minister Takaichi," December 17, 2025, Prime Minister's Office of Japan, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/104/statement/202512/17kaiken.html.

[2] David Goginashvili, "Japan's Foreign Policy Towards the South Caucasus States: Policy of 'Low-Relevance and High Purpose' on the Crossroad Between Russian and Western Interests," *Journal Global Policy and Governance* 5, no. 2 (2016): 51–66, https://doi.org/10.14666/2194-7759-5-2-004; Syuzanna Vasilyan, "Japan's Policy towards the South Caucasus: Pragmatic Even If Enigmatic," *Asia Europe Journal* 15, no. 1 (2017): 55–73, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-016-0462-1; Tomohiko Uyama, Christopher Len, and Tetsuya Hirose, eds., *Nihon no Chūō Ajia gaikō: Tamesareru chiiki senryaku* [*Japan's Central Asian Diplomacy: A Regional Strategy Put to the Test*] (Sapporo: Hokkaido Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009).

ric toward the region has become regional and geostrategic. However, its instruments, mainly official development assistance (ODA), have remained bilateral.[3] This gap is best explained by the institutional structure of Japanese ODA rather than political will.

This article first analyzes the development and trajectory of Japan's foreign policy toward the South Caucasus region. It shows how Tokyo came to decouple the newly independent republics from its unresolved dispute with Moscow. It then traces four phases of engagement with the region: a more ad hoc relationship that followed independence in 1991; the era of Eurasian Diplomacy under Prime Minister Ryūtarō Hashimoto from 1997; the emergence of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity under Foreign Minister Tarō Asō in 2006; and the launch of Foreign Minister Kōno's Caucasus Initiative in 2018. Third, it examines the empirical record of Japanese ODA disbursements to the region. Fourth, it maps that record onto a two-by-two matrix of rhetoric and action. Finally, it analyzes what the Takaichi administration's economic security agenda implies for the region. This study does not claim to be exhaustive; rather, it provides an updated perspective on this underexplored relationship in its contemporary context.

This article argues that Japan's engagement with the South Caucasus reveals a persistent asymmetry between the regional ambition of its diplomatic discourse and the predominantly bilateral character of its policy instruments. Since the launch of Eurasian Diplomacy, the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, and the Caucasus Initiative, Tokyo has increasingly framed the South Caucasus not merely as a collection of newly independent states, but as a strategically significant space connecting Europe and Asia. Yet this regional framing has not produced a correspondingly integrated approach to policy implementation, which continues to rely heavily on country-specific instruments, particularly official development assistance (ODA). This article contends that the discrepancy cannot be explained simply as a lack of political will. Rather, it reflects the tension between Japan's growing interest in regional connectivity and economic security and an established mode of engagement organized around bilateral relationships and nationally defined development projects. By tracing the evolution of Japan's diplomatic discourse alongside its ODA commitments to Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, the article demonstrates that regional strategic recognition does not automatically translate into regionally coordinated policy. This distinction provides a framework for assessing whether Japan's emerging economic-security agenda will generate a more coherent South Caucasus policy or continue to operate through inherited bilateral mechanisms.

[3] It is likely that Tokyo has sought to complement its bilateral ODA instruments through multilateral financial institutions, such as the Asian Development Bank, in relation to cross-border infrastructure and connectivity initiatives such as the Middle Corridor. While this paper focuses exclusively on bilateral ODA, we recognize the need for further investigation into Japan's engagement with the South Caucasus through multilateral financial institutions and leave this as a topic for future research.

Japan's Foreign Policy and the Decoupling of the South Caucasus from Russia

To understand Japan's contemporary engagement with the South Caucasus region, it is first necessary to examine the broader evolution of Japanese foreign policy since World War II. Broadly speaking, this evolution has proceeded through distinct phases. The first phase corresponds to the Cold War period, during which Japan aligned itself with the Western bloc, relying heavily on the US nuclear umbrella for its national security to maintain a regional balance of power. Under the foundational framework of the Yoshida Doctrine, Japan deliberately avoided a prominent geopolitical role, focusing instead on postwar economic recovery and industrial development. Consequently, Tokyo adopted a reactive and reluctant posture in international politics and security. For instance, although Japan joined the United Nations in 1956, four years after the San Francisco Peace Treaty restored its sovereignty, it imposed strict self-restraints on its practical participation in UN initiatives, particularly regarding contributions to international peace and security through peacekeeping operations. This policy of diplomatic self-restraint persisted largely intact until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Instead, Japanese foreign policy during the Cold War remained predominantly centered on economic development. Drawing conceptually from Friedrich List's model of state-led economic intervention, the Japanese government implemented protectionist policies to nurture domestic industries in their early stages. Private enterprises were heavily influenced and institutionally guided by the powerful Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI). This tight trilateral alliance among private corporations, MITI, and the central government served as a strategic apparatus to accelerate export-oriented growth, shielding domestic markets while aggressively enhancing global competitiveness. As a result, Japan achieved its celebrated "economic miracle," emerging as the world's second-largest economic powerhouse behind the United States by the 1970s.

This economic ascendancy eventually provided a mechanism to bridge the gap left by Tokyo's limited political profile. Japan used its material wealth to expand foreign aid, specifically ODA. Propelled by rapid growth, Japan became the world's largest bilateral ODA donor by the late 1980s. A portion of this aid infrastructure would eventually extend to the South Caucasus states following their independence. Throughout this period, Japan consistently downplayed its political and security presence on the global stage, relying instead on economic leadership and robust ODA disbursements to define its superpower status within the constraints of the Cold War order.

However, the Japan–Soviet relationship during the Cold War period remained consistently strained. Following the Soviet Union's breach of the bilateral Neutrality Pact at the end of the Second World War and its subsequent occupation of the Northern Territories, Japan maintained a deep sense of distrust toward Moscow. Primarily due to this unresolved territorial dispute, Tokyo and Moscow never signed an official peace treaty. While Japan maintained a low political and security profile in the wider international community, it concentrated its national defense capabilities along its northern frontier, particularly in the Hokkaido region. Offi-

cially, Tokyo anchored its approach in the strict principle of the "inseparability of politics and economics" (*seikei fukabun*), stating that no large-scale economic cooperation would occur without a clear resolution of the territorial issue.[4] Yet, beneath this rigid stance, Japan pursued a pragmatic approach; vital economic links, particularly energy cooperation in the Sakhalin oil and gas sectors, were quietly maintained despite the ongoing geopolitical tension.

The collapse of the Soviet Union necessitated a fundamental redefinition of Japan's foreign policy. As a nascent "new world order" began to take shape, the international community increasingly expected Tokyo to play a more active role, particularly through security commitments, in addressing emerging regional conflicts. Following intense domestic legislative debates and widespread public demonstrations, Japan gradually expanded its security responsibilities. A watershed moment occurred in 1992, when Japan authorized the deployment of its personnel to UN peacekeeping operations. The September 11 terrorist attacks against the United States in 2001 served as another catalyst for broadening Japan's international security mandate. This was followed by the deployment of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) to Iraq in 2004. Unlike the peacekeeping deployments that had begun in 1992, this mission was undertaken outside a UN peacekeeping framework and in a country where hostilities were ongoing. Concurrently, Tokyo had to navigate immediate regional threats, such as the North Korean nuclear and missile crises of the late 1990s. Compounding these security pressures, the structural foundation of the "economic miracle" fractured in the mid-1990s, plunging the nation into an extended period of domestic economic stagnation known as the "lost decades."

In navigating the post-Cold War era, Japanese policymakers faced two competing structural challenges. First, as a leading global economic power, Japan faced systemic pressure to contribute meaningfully to regional and international stability; however, it had to do so within deeply entrenched domestic legal, constitutional, and normative constraints without destabilizing domestic politics. Second, Japan had to formulate a viable foreign policy that no longer relied purely on an expanding economic surplus. Policymakers were forced to seek alternative diplomatic and strategic tools to adapt to three decades of domestic stagnation while safeguarding long-term national economic security.

When the Soviet Union dissolved, Japan did not immediately draw a firm line between Russia and the other successor states. In the earliest years, Tokyo approached the whole of the post-Soviet space with caution due mainly to wariness of political volatility and uncertain trajectories across the region.[5] Japan's engagement

[4] Akio Kawato, "Tai Chūō Ajia seisaku no suii: 'Shirukurōdo gaikō' kara 'Chūō Ajia purasu Nihon' e" [The Transition of Central Asian Policy: From 'Silk Road Diplomacy' to 'Central Asia Plus Japan'], in *Nihon no Chūō Ajia gaikō: Tamesareru chiiki senryaku* [*Japan's Central Asian Diplomacy: A Regional Strategy Put to the Test*], ed. Tomohiko Uyama, Christopher Len, and Tetsuya Hirose (Sapporo: Hokkaido Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009), 38.

[5] Tetsuya Hirose, "Tai Chūō Ajia gaikō no gaikan: Jitsumu reberu de no seisaku ritsuan-sha no shiten kara" [An Overview of Diplomacy towards Central Asia: From the Perspective of a Working-Level Policymaker], in *Nihon no Chūō Ajia gaikō: Tamesareru chiiki senryaku* [*Japan's Central Asian Diplomacy: A Regional Strategy Put to the Test*], ed. Tomohiko Uyama, Christopher Len, and Tetsuya Hirose (Sapporo: Hokkaido Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009), 4.

with the South Caucasus was correspondingly modest and ad hoc. A clearer differentiation emerged only gradually. Over time, Japanese policymakers came to regard the South Caucasus states, together with the other newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, as nations newly emancipated from the Soviet empire. Unlike Russia, they were regarded as states that had no territorial dispute with Japan and therefore possessed the potential to become constructive contributors to the international order.[6] Thus, strategic wariness and the unresolved island dispute were concentrated on Russia alone. This decoupling of the emancipated republics from Moscow crystallized over the course of the 1990s rather than being a premise Tokyo held from the outset.

This emerging distinction carried direct practical consequences, best understood against the Soviet-era legacy described above. Toward Moscow, Tokyo had long bound economic engagement to the principle of *seikei fukabun*, withholding large-scale cooperation until the territorial question was resolved.[7] By contrast, the South Caucasus states were subject to no such precondition because they had no territorial dispute with Japan. This absence of a territorial dispute freed Tokyo to extend grant aid and, subsequently, Japanese yen loans to the South Caucasus region without tethering them to any political precondition.[8]

Japan was careful to cultivate friendly ties with the South Caucasus without provoking Russian anxieties over its former periphery, and it had no wish to drag the region into its bilateral disputes with Moscow.[9] The result was a deliberately pragmatic posture anchored in the provision of foreign aid. It was at the intersection of domestic institutional constraints, shifting international expectations, and this delicate balance between strategic wariness of Russia and the conscious decoupling of the emancipated post-Soviet states from Moscow that Japan's contemporary approach to the South Caucasus first took shape.

Four Phases of Japan's Foreign Policy towards the South Caucasus

While there were some historical connections between Japan and the South Caucasus countries before the end of the Cold War and World War II, Japan's modern

[6] Tomohiko Uyama, Christopher Len, and Tetsuya Hirose, "Jo" [Introduction], in *Nihon no Chūō Ajia gaikō: Tamesareru chiiki senryaku* [*Japan's Central Asian Diplomacy: A Regional Strategy Put to the Test*], ed. Tomohiko Uyama, Christopher Len, and Tetsuya Hirose (Sapporo: Hokkaido Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009), i.

[7] Kawato, "Tai Chūō Ajia seisaku no suii," 38.

[8] Yōko Hirose, "Minami Kōkasasu to 'hazama no chiseigaku'" [The South Caucasus and the 'Geopolitics of the In-Between'], in *Yūrashia dainamizumu to Nihon* [*Eurasian Dynamism and Japan*], ed. Japan Forum on International Relations, supervised by Hirotaka Watanabe (Tokyo: Chuo Koron Shinsha, 2022), 288.

[9] Tomohiko Uyama, "Tai Chūō Ajia gaikō no rekishiteki bunmyaku to tenbō: Ajia shugi to Nichibei kankei no hazama de" [The Historical Context and Outlook of Central Asian Diplomacy: Between Asianism and Japan-US Relations], in *Nihon no Chūō Ajia gaikō: Tamesareru chiiki senryaku* [*Japan's Central Asian Diplomacy: A Regional Strategy Put to the Test*], ed. Tomohiko Uyama, Christopher Len, and Tetsuya Hirose (Sapporo: Hokkaido Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009), 91; Hirose, "Minami Kōkasasu to 'hazama no chiseigaku,'" 288.

foreign policy toward the region began to develop across four distinct phases following the collapse of the Soviet Union.[10]

Setting Up the Diplomatic Channels for Japanese ODA (1991–1996): The first phase spans 1991–1996. In 1991, following the dramatic end of the Cold War, Japan began seeking ways to connect with the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. In August 1992, Georgia became the first country in the South Caucasus region to establish formal diplomatic relations with Japan. Armenia and Azerbaijan followed shortly after in September of the same year. With official diplomatic channels open, Japan began providing ODA to these three nations. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the primary agency for Japanese foreign aid, reported that the country began distributing ODA to the South Caucasus in 1994. Recognizing that these newly independent states were in the fragile early stages of state-building, facing political transitions toward democratization, weak basic infrastructure, and economic instability, Japan focused its efforts on technical cooperation for human resource development and grant aid to meet basic human needs. Japan also extended its first official yen loans to Georgia and Azerbaijan for power plant projects in fiscal 1997.[11]

However, during this initial phase from 1992 to 1996, prior to the announcement of "Eurasian Diplomacy" by then-Prime Minister Ryūtarō Hashimoto, Japan's foreign policy toward the South Caucasus remained modest. This minimal and somewhat ad hoc engagement stemmed from Tokyo's cautious approach to taking on international roles in the post-Cold War order, as well as its careful management of the politically unstable post-Soviet space.[12] The underlying attitude at the time favored small, manageable commitments over a grand strategic mandate.

Hashimoto's Eurasian Diplomacy (1997–2005): Following this initial period of minimal engagement, Japan gradually shifted its foreign policy toward the region from 1997. This change became clear when then-Prime Minister Hashimoto announced his "Eurasian Diplomacy" framework, which served as Japan's first policy-oriented vision for the post-Soviet space, including the South Caucasus. While Hashimoto's view of "Eurasia" primarily encompassed Russia, China, and Central Asia, his underlying objective was to secure the long-term strategic inter-

[10] Vasilyan, Len, and Takahata also characterize Japan's foreign policy toward the wider Eurasian region, including Central Asia, in similar phases. See Vasilyan, "Japan's Policy towards the South Caucasus"; Christopher Len, "Nihon no Chūō Ajia ni taisuru kanyo o dō rikai suru ka: Kaihatsu senryaku no saihyōka" [Understanding Japan's Central Asian Engagement: A Reassessment of Development Strategy], in *Nihon no Chūō Ajia gaikō: Tamesareru chiiki senryaku* [*Japan's Central Asian Diplomacy: A Regional Strategy Put to the Test*], ed. Tomohiko Uyama, Christopher Len, and Tetsuya Hirose, trans. Masaru Suda (Sapporo: Hokkaido Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009), 39–54; Yōhei Takahata, "'Yūrashia gaikō' to iu Nihon no sentaku" [Japan's Choice of 'Eurasian Diplomacy'], in *Yūrashia dainamizumu to Nihon* [*Eurasian Dynamism and Japan*], ed. Japan Forum on International Relations, supervised by Hirotaka Watanabe (Tokyo: Chuo Koron Shinsha, 2022), 129–61.

[11] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Chiikibetsu enjo no dōkō" [Trends in Assistance by Region], in *Wagakuni no seifu kaihatsu enjo no jisshi jōkyō (1997-nendo) ni kansuru nenji hōkoku* [*Annual Report on the Implementation of Japan's Official Development Assistance (FY1997)*] (1998), https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryo/hakusyo/nenji97/nji97_2.html#2_1_3.

[12] Goginashvili, "Japan's Foreign Policy Towards the South Caucasus States"; Vasilyan, "Japan's Policy towards the South Caucasus."

ests of a resource-scarce Japan by building stronger ties with the resource-rich nations of the South Caucasus.

When Hashimoto addressed the Japan Association of Corporate Executives on July 24, 1997, he introduced three pillars for his Eurasian Diplomacy vision. First was political dialogue. He aimed to enhance mutual trust and understanding by conducting regular high-level political exchanges. The second pillar was economic cooperation and resource development. Hashimoto attempted to strengthen economic ties to foster mutual prosperity, specifically by supporting the transition of post-Soviet economic systems toward market-oriented economies. The third pillar involved cooperation for peace and stability through democratization and nuclear nonproliferation.

For the South Caucasus, Hashimoto's vision meant that Japan formally recognized the geostrategic value of the region, viewing it as a potential bridge for trade and a vital source of natural resources. In this context, Hashimoto expressed great interest in seeing Japanese corporations participate in oil and energy exploration in Azerbaijan.[13] This step demonstrated the first tangible shift toward elevating Japan's diplomatic presence in the region.

The vision was translated into an operational framework in January 1998, when the government adopted the Silk Road Diplomacy Action Plan under Foreign Minister Keizō Obuchi. Under this plan, Obuchi set out three priorities: the enhancement of political dialogue, cooperation on developing energy sources and infrastructure, and cooperation on nuclear nonproliferation and democratization.[14] Succeeding Hashimoto as prime minister in July of the same year, Obuchi reiterated the importance of this plan during his speech at the UN General Assembly in September 1998.[15]

Several practical steps soon followed. In May 1999, Foreign Minister Masahiko Kōmura visited Baku, Azerbaijan, marking the first official visit by a Japanese foreign minister to the South Caucasus since the Second World War. Kōmura's historic visit brought concrete support, including a new yen loan for a power plant project, infrastructure grants for the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Mine Action, and an agreement to help protect local cultural heritage. In January 2000, the Japanese government opened its first embassy in the region in Baku, a gesture that Azerbaijan returned by opening its Tokyo embassy in 2005.

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[13] Ryūtarō Hashimoto, "Address to the Japan Association of Corporate Executives: The Future Direction of Japan's Foreign Policy, Focusing on Relations with Russia," July 24, 1997, Japanese text reproduced in The World and Japan Database, https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/exdpm/19970724.S1J.html.

[14] Institute of Developing Economies, JETRO, "Ajia dōkō nenpō jūyō nisshi kensaku shisutemu" [Asian Trends Annual Report: Important Events Database], accessed August 26, 2026, https://d-arch.ide.go.jp/Doukou/AZ1990.html.

[15] Keizō Obuchi, "Dai 53-kai Kokuren Sōkai ni okeru Obuchi sōri daijin ippan tōron enzetsu: Fukudai Heiwa to kaihatsu, sono tame no kaikaku" [Address by Prime Minister Keizō Obuchi at the 53rd Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations: Peace and Development, and Reforms to These Ends], September 21, 1998, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/enzetsu/10/eos_0921.html.

In short, Hashimoto's Eurasian Diplomacy and the practical steps taken by Obuchi and Kōmura laid a solid foundation for Japan's post-Soviet relations with the South Caucasus. While this phase was not a complete overhaul of Japan's foreign policy, it helped Japan pursue a more active role on the global stage.

Tarō Asō's Arc of Freedom and Prosperity (2006–2017): Japan's foreign policy toward the South Caucasus entered a third phase in November 2006, when then-Foreign Minister Tarō Asō, serving under the first Shinzō Abe administration, announced his vision for the "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity." In his landmark speech, Asō emphasized two major shifts. First, alongside ties with traditional allies such as the United States and regional powers such as China and Russia, Japan's foreign policy would now emphasize universal values such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and market economies. Second, using these values as a foundation, Japan aimed to form an "arc" of stable, prosperous nations along the outer rim of the Eurasian continent.

Asō explicitly pointed to the South Caucasus as a key region for this policy, noting that Central Asian and Caucasus nations such as Georgia and Azerbaijan were extremely important to global energy and natural resource supply chains.[16] He committed Japan to serving as an "escort runner" to support these countries in their long-term development and political transitions.[17]

Compared to Hashimoto's earlier policy, Asō's framework highlighted a much more direct, geostrategic connection between Japan and the South Caucasus, viewing the region as a potentially vital corridor linking Japan to Europe. This conceptual shift matched steady growth in Japan's ODA allocations to the region starting around 2006.

However, the "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" vision was relatively short-lived. Its heavy focus on values faced resistance from regional powers; Russia viewed the policy as a containment strategy disguised as democracy promotion, and China took a highly cautious stance. Even some Southeast Asian countries were uncomfortable treating liberal democratic principles as universal values, as they also faced domestic human rights issues. Additionally, domestic political instability in Tokyo, including a rapid succession of short-lived prime ministers (Shinzō Abe, Yasuo Fukuda, and Tarō Asō himself between 2006 and 2009), prevented Japan from fully using this vision to deepen its ties with the South Caucasus states.

Tarō Kōno's Caucasus Initiative (2018–Present): A major turning point arrived when Shinzō Abe returned to office as prime minister in 2012. Abe's foreign policy focused on a global approach, driven by his vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). He also sought to diversify Japan's diplomatic channels by engaging partners with pragmatic strategic interests beyond the immediate Indo-Pacific area. This approach sought to implement Japan's "diplomacy from a panoramic

[16] Tarō Asō, "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan's Expanding Diplomatic Horizons," speech at the Japan Institute of International Affairs Seminar, Tokyo, November 30, 2006, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm/aso/speech0611.html.
[17] Asō, "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity."

perspective of the globe." As part of this effort to build trans-regional connections between Asia and Europe, Abe made historic visits to Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan) in October 2015 to reinvigorate the "Central Asia Plus Japan" Dialogue,[18] and strongly supported the development of the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor.

It was within this strategic context that Foreign Minister Tarō Kōno, under the second Abe administration, advanced Japan's regional policy by launching the "Caucasus Initiative" during his official visit to the region from September 3 to 5, 2018. Kōno's trip was highly significant for several reasons. First, it was the first visit to Armenia and Georgia by a Japanese foreign minister. For Azerbaijan, it was the second such visit, following Masahiko Kōmura's visit in May 1999. Second, Kōno explicitly described the South Caucasus as the "linchpin" of the transport corridor spanning the Eurasian continent and a crucial "gateway" connecting Asia and Europe. This was the clearest reaffirmation of the place of the South Caucasus in Japan's foreign policy as vital for Abe's "diplomacy from a panoramic perspective of the globe" (*Chikyū wo fukan suru gaikō*). Third, the initiative laid out two clear pillars: cooperation on human resource development for long-term state-building, and support for high-quality infrastructure to open up business opportunities under the banner of an "Appealing Caucasus."[19]

Under the first pillar, Japan focused on training programs centered on the rule of law, environmental protection, and disaster risk reduction through JICA. Under the second pillar, Kōno highlighted large-scale yen loan projects for power, water, and sanitation infrastructure in Azerbaijan. In Georgia, he signed an agreement for a substantial loan to support the East-West Highway Improvement Project, directly enhancing the logistics link between the Black and Caspian Seas. Armenia received aid for disaster prevention, crisis communication, and rural development, alongside growing collaboration in the technology sector.[20] A visible extension of this technological connection appeared in June 2025, when TUMO Gunma opened in Takasaki as the first Asian franchise of Armenia's TUMO Center for Creative Technologies. The center allows Japanese youth to learn information technology and creative design through an Armenian-designed educational platform.[21]

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[18] The Central Asia Plus Japan Dialogue was established by then-Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi under Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi in August 2004. Kawaguchi launched it during foreign ministerial meetings with Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan). She set three goals: promoting regional cooperation, enhancing multilateral relationships among the Central Asian countries beyond bilateral relations, and contributing to regional stability and prosperity. Abe incorporated this existing framework into the strategic diversification of Japan's foreign policy to promote transregional connectivity between Asia and Europe.

[19] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Kōno gaimu daijin no Arumenia, Jōjia, Azerubaijan oyobi Doitsu hōmon" [Foreign Minister Kōno's Visit to the Three Caucasus Countries and Germany], September 6, 2018, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/erp/ca_c/page24_000954.html; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japan's Caucasus Initiative* (2018), 1–2, https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000436761.pdf.

[20] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japan's Caucasus Initiative*, 1–2.

[21] Japan International Cooperation Agency, "Armenia × Gunma × Digital: TUMO Gunma, a Partnership between Armenia's TUMO Center and Gunma Prefecture, Has Opened," June 2, 2025, https://www.jica.go.jp/information/seminar/2025/1569394_66420.html.

Furthermore, Kōno's political signaling during this phase was highly tailored. He recognized Armenia and Georgia as important partners that shared fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.[22] When dealing with Azerbaijan, Kōno stepped away from values-based rhetoric and instead focused on pragmatic economic security, emphasizing that Azerbaijan plays a key role in international energy security and that it is vital for Japan to further enhance bilateral relations with Azerbaijan.[23]

In September 2022, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida marked the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations with the three South Caucasus nations. Reinforcing the narratives established by Kōno in 2018, Kishida formally recognized Armenia and Georgia as crucial partners in building a free and open international order based on the rule of law,[24] while highlighting Azerbaijan as a key partner for regional peace and stability.[25] Kishida's statements solidified Japan's ongoing commitment to the Caucasus Initiative, firmly cementing the region's status as an indispensable gateway for Asia-Europe connectivity.

Empirical Pillars: Diplomatic Bluebooks and ODA in the South Caucasus

The previous section traced Japan's evolving foreign policy toward the South Caucasus through four distinct phases. This section analyzes how Japan has perceived the region and what practical actions it has taken when engaging with these nations. To assess the scope and intensity of Japan's regional engagement, this study draws on the *Diplomatic Bluebook* and the *ODA White Paper* as its principal official sources. To capture these policy dimensions, the original Japanese-language versions of these publicly available documents were examined.[26]

The South Caucasus in Japan's Diplomatic Bluebooks: An analysis of the *Diplomatic Bluebooks* over the years reveals changes in the assessments of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). Generally, the early editions described the South Caucasus strictly within a post-Soviet context dominated by persistent regional conflicts. Over time, while the documents continued to view the region as a group of newly independent states affected by localized disputes, they began

[22] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan-Armenia Foreign Ministers' Meeting," September 3, 2018, https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/ca_c/am/page6e_000137.html; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan-Georgia Foreign Ministers' Meeting," September 4, 2018, https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/ca_c/ge/page6e_000136.html.

[23] Tarō Kōno, "Minister Taro Kono: It Is an Honor for Me to Contribute to Further Development of Azerbaijan-Japan Relations," AZERTAC, September 5, 2018, 1, reproduced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000396796.pdf.

[24] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Kōkasasu kakkoku to no gaikō kankei juritsu sanjū-shūnen ni saisuru shunō-kan oyobi gaishō-kan no shokan no kōkan ni tsuite" [Exchange of Letters between Leaders and Foreign Ministers on the Occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations with the Caucasus Countries], September 28, 2022, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/erp/ca_c/shin4_000064.html.

[25] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Kōkasasu kakkoku to no gaikō kankei juritsu sanjū-shūnen."

[26] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Diplomatic Bluebook," Japanese-language archive, accessed October 16, 2026, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/bluebook/index.html.

placing greater emphasis on the gradual development of bilateral relations and the region's role in safeguarding Japan's geostrategic interests.

Phase One (1991–1996): The *Diplomatic Bluebooks* during this initial phase focused heavily on post-independence political instability. They highlighted the outbreak of violent conflicts in South Ossetia (Georgia) and Nagorno-Karabakh (involving Azerbaijan and Armenia). The Bluebooks also depicted the region as struggling economically due to a collapse in production, hyperinflation, and mounting refugee crises.

Phase Two (1997–2005): The tone of the Bluebooks remained largely cautious as regional conflicts persisted. However, Azerbaijan's potential value to Japan's geostrategic and energy security interests was explicitly recognized during this period. Consequently, the Bluebooks began highlighting Japan's commitment to enhancing political dialogue, economic and resource cooperation, and peacebuilding assistance as core components of its regional strategy.

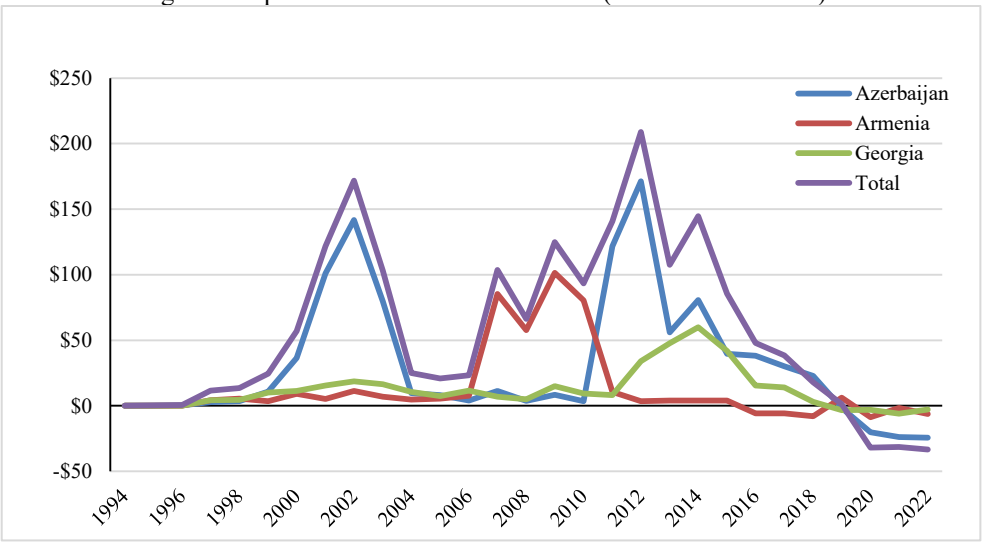
Phase Three (2006–2017): Continued military confrontations in South Ossetia and the subsequent Russian intervention in 2008 remained primary security concerns in the Bluebooks. Despite this volatility, the Bluebooks stressed major institutional milestones in building a stronger diplomatic foundation, notably the opening of mutual embassies. Georgia opened its embassy in Tokyo in February 2007 and Japan opened its embassy in Tbilisi in January 2009. Armenia opened its embassy in Tokyo in July 2010 and Japan opened its embassy in Yerevan in January 2015. Together with the Japanese embassy in Baku, opened in January 2000, and the Azerbaijani embassy in Tokyo, opened in 2005, this gave Japan resident missions in all three capitals for the first time.

Phase Four (2018–Present): Japan continued to voice deep concern regarding regional instability, first during the war of September to November 2020 and then during the Azerbaijani operation of September 2023, after which more than one hundred thousand ethnic Armenians left Nagorno-Karabakh for Armenia. While calling for prompt and peaceful conflict resolution, recent Bluebooks explicitly welcomed the joint statement of December 2023, in which Baku and Yerevan reaffirmed their intention to normalize relations and conclude a peace treaty. On August 8, 2025, the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a Joint Declaration in Washington, witnessed by the US president; the foreign ministers of the two countries also initialed the agreed text of their peace agreement. Most significantly, this phase highlighted the launch of Foreign Minister Kōno's "Caucasus Initiative," formally framing the region as a vital "linchpin" and "gateway" connecting East and West.

Japan's ODA toward the South Caucasus: Beyond tracking policy rhetoric in the *Diplomatic Bluebooks*, Japan's primary mechanism for practical engagement has been the consistent distribution of ODA. Figure 1 illustrates Japan's ODA net disbursements to Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, alongside the regional total since 1994. The data show that Japan initially directed the bulk of its regional ODA toward Azerbaijan. While Baku remained a primary partner, Armenia and Georgia later became major beneficiaries of Japanese assistance. Because these figures in-

clude both net grant aid and yen loans, the data occasionally reflect low or negative values; these are primarily due to the structured repayment schedules of large yen loans rather than a sudden withdrawal of Japanese financial aid.

Figure 1. Japan's Net ODA Disbursements (Million US Dollars)[27]



Azerbaijan: In the immediate post-Soviet era, Japan focused primarily on providing humanitarian assistance to Azerbaijan. Early *ODA White Papers* show that Tokyo supplied medical goods and funded human resource training programs, alongside a $2.66 million allocation to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).[28] However, Japan's long-term strategy for Azerbaijan relied far more heavily on yen loans than grant aid, prioritizing three main sectors: economic infrastructure (energy, logistics, and communications), social development, and human resource training. Major projects in the country included the Severnaya Gas Combined Cycle Power Plant Project, implemented in two phases between 1997 and 2003, for which MOFA records indicate Japan committed ¥39.03 billion;[29] the Provincial Cities Water Supply and Sewerage Project, authorized in

[27] The data were retrieved from Japan's ODA country databooks for various years. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan's ODA Data by Country," accessed August 26, 2026, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/data/index.html. The low or negative figures in the graph primarily reflect repayment schedules for Japanese yen loans rather than a sharp decrease in ODA disbursements.

[28] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Seifu kaihatsu enjo (ODA): Kunibetsu dēta bukku 2002* [*Official Development Assistance (ODA): Databook by Country 2002*] (2002), https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryo/kuni/02_databook/caj/top_caj.html.

[29] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Seifu kaihatsu enjo (ODA): Kunibetsu dēta bukku 2004* [*Official Development Assistance (ODA): Databook by Country 2004*] (2004), Azerbaijan, table 8, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryo/kuni/04_databook/03_c_asia/c_asia_06/c_asia_06_t08.html. This is approximately US$330 million, assuming ¥120 to US$1.

2009 with a JICA loan totaling approximately ¥32.85 billion;[30] and the Shimal Gas Combined Cycle Power Plant Project (Second Unit), for which construction was initially scheduled for 2007–2009 but deferred to 2011–2019, with ¥28.83 billion disbursed under the Japanese loan.[31]

Armenia: Japan's ODA framework for Armenia focused on three distinct pillars: human resource development alongside basic infrastructure, the promotion of human security, and capacity building for disaster prevention and relief. As in Azerbaijan, Japan initiated its relationship with humanitarian aid, distributing $4.99 million in direct relief and $4.3 million to the UNHCR in 1993, followed by specialized disaster prevention training programs in 1994. Landmark projects included the Yerevan Combined Cycle Co-Generation Power Plant Project, which commenced in 2005, with ¥26.399 billion disbursed under the loan by July 2013;[32] and the Project for Improvement of Fire Fighting Equipment in Yerevan City, for which a grant agreement was signed in February 2009, with actual disbursements of ¥781 million to modernize firefighting services in the Armenian capital through specialized rescue gear and technical support.[33] By 2022, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and JICA classified both Armenia and Georgia as upper-middle-income countries and territories (UMICs).

Georgia: Japan's initial ODA to Georgia followed a familiar blueprint, prioritizing basic economic infrastructure, specifically in the energy sector, alongside human resource training. Initial support consisted of a $4.83 million package providing medical supplies, fuel, and vaccines. In fiscal 1997, Japan approved a ¥5.332 billion loan to modernize generation capacity at the Lajanuri and Khurami hydropower plants.[34] Following the August 2008 military conflict in South Ossetia, the focus of Japanese ODA shifted heavily toward highway and logistics infrastructure to secure regional trade lines. Launching the East-West Highway Improvement Project (Phase One) in 2009, Japan extended a ¥17.722 billion loan to overhaul the country's primary transit route.[35] This was followed by a subsequent

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[30] Japan International Cooperation Agency, *Ex-Ante Evaluation (for Japanese ODA Loan): Provincial Cities Water Supply and Sewerage Project* (2009), 1–2, https://www2.jica.go.jp/en/evaluation/pdf/2009_AZB-P4_1_f.pdf.

[31] Hisae Takahashi, *FY2019 Ex-Post Evaluation of Japanese ODA Loan: Shimal Gas Combined Cycle Power Plant Project (Second Unit) (*Japan International Cooperation Agency, n.d.*),* 3, 9, accessed October 16, 2026, https://www2.jica.go.jp/en/evaluation/pdf/2019_AZB-P3_4_f.pdf.

[32] Kenichi Inazawa, *FY2015 Ex-Post Evaluation of Japanese ODA Loan: Yerevan Combined Cycle Co-Generation Power Plant Project (*Japan International Cooperation Agency, n.d.*),* 2–3, accessed October 16, 2026, https://www2.jica.go.jp/en/evaluation/pdf/2015_ARM-P2_4_f.pdf.

[33] Koichiro Ishimori, *Ex-Post Evaluation of Japanese ODA Grant Aid Project: The Project for Improvement of Fire Fighting Equipment in Yerevan City (*Japan International Cooperation Agency, n.d.*),* 2, accessed October 16, 2026, https://www2.jica.go.jp/en/evaluation/pdf/2013_0867940_4_f.pdf.

[34] Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund, "First Yen Loan to Georgia: Japan Assists Modernization of Two Hydro-Power Plants," January 19, 1998, 1, https://www2.jica.go.jp/yen_loan/pdf/en/4637/19980119.pdf.

[35] Japan International Cooperation Agency, "Signing of Japanese ODA Loan Agreement with Georgia: Road Infrastructure to Assist with Regional Economic Development and Post-war Rehabilitation," December 17, 2009, 1–2, https://www2.jica.go.jp/yen_loan/pdf/en/5978/20091217.pdf.

loan of ¥4.41 billion,[36] which was later supplemented by an additional ¥38.735 billion loan.[37] This concentrated investment in transit infrastructure highlights the strategic value Japan assigns to Georgia. The East-West Highway serves as an indispensable portion of the broader Eurasian transit corridor, physically linking the Black and Caspian Seas. In the view of Japanese policymakers, Georgia possesses significant potential to serve as a vital logistics hub bridging the European and Asian continents.

Rhetoric and Instruments: A Two-by-Two Reading

So far, we have analyzed Japan's engagement with the South Caucasus region by examining the political rhetoric of Japanese decision makers and substantive cooperation via ODA. To clarify the scope and direction of Japan's engagement with the region, we map its rhetoric and substantive actions onto the following two-by-two matrix.

The horizontal axis distinguishes the rhetoric of Japanese decision makers from substantive actions commensurate with that rhetoric. The vertical axis indicates the scale of Japanese engagement, from bilateral engagement at the micro level to regional geostrategic positioning at the macro level. Up to this point, Japan's engagement with the South Caucasus region has primarily been expressed through rhetorical descriptions of Eurasia and the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity. The substantive actions taken by Tokyo have primarily involved the initial establishment of diplomatic relations and subsequent provision of grants and yen loans to ensure human security and basic infrastructure development.

	Rhetoric	**Substantive Actions**
Bilateral/Micro-Level Analysis	Hashimoto's Eurasian Diplomacy Asō's Arc of Freedom and Prosperity	Establishment of diplomatic relations Provision of grants and loans through ODA for human security and basic infrastructure development
Regional Geostrategic Positioning/Macro-Level Analysis	Kōno's Caucasus Initiative Post-"linchpin" and "gateway" Absence of Takaichi's rhetoric	East-West Highway Improvement Project

[36] Japan International Cooperation Agency, "Signing of Japanese ODA Loan Agreement with Georgia: Strengthening Competitiveness as a Regional Logistics Hub by Improving an International Corridor," March 8, 2016, 1, https://www2.jica.go.jp/yen_loan/pdf/en/6671/20160308.pdf.

[37] Japan International Cooperation Agency, "Signing of Japanese ODA Loan Agreement with Georgia: Eliminating a Logistics Impediment and Contributing to Strengthened Transportation Capacity through Improvement of a Major International Corridor," September 4, 2018, 1, https://www2.jica.go.jp/yen_loan/pdf/en/6975/20180904_01.pdf.

Kōno's Caucasus Initiative signaled the beginning of a rhetorical shift, recasting the South Caucasus as a "linchpin" and "gateway." Substantive action, however, has been slower to follow. During his visit to Georgia, Kōno signed an agreement for a substantial yen loan to support the East-West Highway Improvement Project, directly enhancing the logistics link between the Black and Caspian Seas. This project was administered as a bilateral infrastructure loan to Georgia, consistent with the micro-level pattern established since the 1990s.

Yet, its function is not confined to that level. The corridor it improves is the same route that now carries a growing share of Middle Corridor trade bypassing Russia. This suggests that the project's strategic significance operates at the macro level even though its administration remains bilateral.

The bottom-right cell of the matrix is not entirely empty; it is populated by a single case whose macro relevance is latent rather than declared, an infrastructure loan whose geostrategic significance was never articulated in Tokyo's own rhetoric at the time it was made. What is genuinely missing is a substantive action conceived and justified as macro-level engagement from the outset. It is cooperation that Tokyo designs, funds, and frames explicitly as regional-corridor policy, rather than bilateral aid that later acquires geostrategic relevance in retrospect.

Why does this gap persist at the macro level? The primary reason lies in the institutional nature of Japan's ODA. Both Japanese grants and yen loans are structured around bilateral agreements negotiated with a single recipient government, with disbursement tied to that government's development plans and, for loans, repayment capacity. This institutional architecture is well suited to funding a specific national project, such as a highway segment or a power grid upgrade, precisely because there is one government to negotiate with, one budget cycle to align, and one set of conditionalities to satisfy.

Financing a regional corridor that runs across all three South Caucasus states, by contrast, would require harmonizing terms, timelines, and priorities across multiple sovereign governments simultaneously. Such coordination becomes a hurdle for which Japan's ODA framework, designed for bilateral delivery, offers no ready-made instrument. It is not necessarily that Tokyo lacks the political will to fund macro-level connectivity; rather, the institutional framework through which Japanese aid has always flowed makes bilateral, country-by-country engagement the path of least resistance, even when the strategic rationale being invoked is explicitly regional.

Conclusion

Since taking office in October 2025, Prime Minister Takaichi has placed a strong emphasis on ensuring economic security. This was a natural extension of her policy as minister for economic security under the Kishida administration. In Hanoi, Vietnam, in May 2026, Takaichi announced an updated version of the FOIP framework built on three priority areas: building economic infrastructure for the age of artificial intelligence and data, including resilient supply chains for energy and critical materials; co-creating economic growth opportunities and sharing rules

through public-private cooperation; and expanding security cooperation for regional peace and stability.[38] Supply chain resilience thus became a headline FOIP commitment, signaling her emphasis on supplies critical to energy and the economy.

While Takaichi was the first to frame it in terms of economic security, Japan had already articulated its position on strengthening supply chains. Since 2023, Japan has emphasized the growing importance of the South Caucasus region in the context of the "Trans-Caspian Sea Route" (*Kaspikai rūto*), a transport corridor connecting Central Asia and Europe through the region while bypassing Russia. The same physical corridor is more commonly known internationally as the Middle Corridor, and Japan's own aid documents also use the term Trans-Caspian International Transport Route. These developments seem to suggest that Takaichi should place strong geostrategic importance on the South Caucasus region in her own economic security agenda.

However, Takaichi has remained quieter and slower to articulate a similar narrative in this regional context, let alone to take actions commensurate with such an agenda. As of August 2026, some ten months after she first took office and six months after the general election, no political speeches, documents, or diplomatic initiatives have been delivered, published, or initiated under the Takaichi administration.

There are three plausible reasons for this relative absence of narrative and action. First, and most optimistically, the South Caucasus may simply be incorporated into the wider, updated FOIP framework under Takaichi, without requiring specific labeling of the region. In this case, the absence is due primarily to a change in the level of abstraction in Japan's approach to the region, not necessarily a decline in its regional interest. Second, it may be a matter of priority. Takaichi's administration is relatively new, and it prioritizes immediate issues such as relations with the US, China, Russia, and Iran, and its own defense budget. A narrative and initiative dedicated to the South Caucasus region may follow once Takaichi has satisfactorily dealt with these higher-priority issues. Third, and least optimistically, Takaichi may have decided not to provide the institutional weight or develop a separate initiative beyond already existing rhetoric and actions, due to the pressing issues mentioned above. The South Caucasus, in this case, remains marginal to Japan's economic security strategy, regardless of the recognition it received under previous administrations.

The reality is likely a combination of these three factors. Whether Takaichi's economic security diplomacy eventually produces a distinct South Caucasus policy or whether the region continues to be governed by inherited bilateral instruments,

[38] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "The Updated 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP),'" May 2, 2026, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/pageite_000001_01612.html.

namely ODA, remains an open question that only the coming years of her administration can answer.[39]

Japan's engagement with the South Caucasus has become more regional in its strategic framing without undergoing a comparable transformation in its policy instruments. Tokyo increasingly recognizes the region's significance as a link between Europe and Asia and as a potential component of broader connectivity and economic-security strategies. The future trajectory of Japanese engagement will depend on whether economic security and connectivity become organizing principles of practical cooperation or remain primarily features of diplomatic discourse. Japan's experience thus offers a broader insight into contemporary foreign policy: how regional strategic ambition and bilateral implementation can coexist.

Conflict of Interests
The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.
Ethical Standards
The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.

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[39] Takahata, "'Yūrashia gaikō' to iu Nihon no sentaku." Takahata proposes that Japan consider what he calls "Eurasian Diplomacy 2.0" in addition to the current FOIP framework and the US-Japan alliance system. He argues that geostrategic competition among the US, Russia, and China will continue. Under these circumstances, Japan should recognize that many countries and regions in Eurasia could offer it support. Doing so will help shape Japan's diplomatic choices.

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