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## BULLETIN

### Japan Counters China and Russia in Africa

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At the eighth Japanese development conference on Africa (TICAD-8), held on 27-28 August in the Tunisian capital, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida promised to spend \$30 billion over the next three years on development programmes in Africa. Japan uses this initiative to counter the activity of Russia and China on the African continent, promoting a development model linked to an order based on law and multilateralism.

Due to the constitutional limitations on Japan's military activity, development policy is an important means of increasing the country's role in the world by promoting its soft power, technology, investments, and building political partnerships. Against this background, activities in Africa stand out, to which the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) has been devoted since 1993, currently co-organised with the UN, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the World Bank, and the African Union Commission. The conferences are convened every three years, alternating between Japan and Africa. One of the founders and a long-term patron of the initiative was the former Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe, who was murdered in July this year. The format of the TICAD meetings gathers most of the continent's leaders, development organisations, and Japanese and African businesses and has inspired, among others, the EU, China, Turkey, and Russia to convene their own political and economic summits with African leaders. The TICAD model is distinguished by an emphasis on multilateral partnerships with the participation of the Japanese development agency, JICA, and regional organisations or institutions (e.g., African Development Bank, AfDB, which finances joint projects in a 50/50 arrangement), and the participation of beneficiaries in the creation and implementation of projects. Japanese development activities take place on a continuous basis (not only for the summits), and in their coordination, an important role is played by the TICAD department at the UNDP headquarters in New York.

**The Course of the Summit.** Forty-eight African countries were represented at the Tunis conference. A sense that the initiative was weakening, felt during the previous edition (TICAD-7 in Yokohama in 2019), resulted in half the number of heads of state present this year—just 20. If last time the main burden of planned activities was directed to private investments (\$20 billion), in Tunisia public programmes again dominated.

During TICAD-8, Japan made \$4 billion commitment for the green transformation and decarbonisation in Africa, \$5 billion in loans to the AfDB to strengthen the fiscal stability of countries affected by the effects of global crises, and \$1 billion for infectious diseases prevention. Japanese support is also expected to improve state services in the [terror-affected border areas of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger](#). The total value of aid and investment is expected to reach \$30 billion in the next three years. The Japanese prime minister, in his speech opening the conference, also explicitly supported the idea of reforming the UN Security Council to include a permanent place for representation from Africa.

However, the conference experienced a diplomatic tear, with the withdrawal of some delegations in protest of the presence of the representation of Western Sahara, a territory that Morocco considers its own and the African Union (AU) deems as sovereign. In a gesture of protest, the Moroccan delegation boycotted the conference, as did Guinea-Bissau (whose president is currently chairing the

West African bloc ECOWAS), while representatives of Liberia even demanded its adjournment.

**In the Context of the Rivalry with China.** TICAD positions Japanese solutions as an alternative to the Chinese model of development cooperation in Africa and, more broadly, to Chinese policies towards the continent. The Japanese solutions differ from the Chinese pattern (Forum for China-Africa Cooperation, FOCAC), which is dominated by top-down planning and unilateral, direct Chinese actions. Japan, for example, promotes multilateral partnerships and a more transparent selection of NGOs participating in TICAD activities. Unlike China, which cedes a selection of NGOs to the ruling parties, Japan's non-governmental partners are actually involved in designing new initiatives.

Since 2019 and TICAD-7, the tone of the Japanese-African "summits" is clearly being used in the political rivalry with China. Although in the speech broadcast in Tunis Kishida did not refer directly to China, he pointed to the strengthening of cooperation under the [Free and Open Indo-Pacific Initiative](#), which is a counter-proposal to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. Similarly, his call to maintain an international order based on respect of principles and freedoms, it had an anti-China overtone.

Although Japan does not have the potential to catch up with China in terms of, for example, the value of investments (in 2021, \$5.8 billion from Japan, compared to \$43 billion from China), it has upped the competition by offering training to 300,000 African specialists over the next three years. This is a response to a Chinese programme operating since 2000 that offers short-term training for around 10,000 officials from African countries each year. On the other hand, an attempt by Japan to strengthen the narrative condemning China for using "debt traps" was unsuccessful, despite donating \$1 billion for debt consolidation. China announced a week earlier than the conference that it would abolish the repayments of some loans by 17 African countries and redirect \$10 billion in IMF special drawing rights for post-pandemic reconstruction to Africa.

**The Context of the Russian Aggression.** Contrary to the veiled criticism of China, Prime Minister Kishida directly pointed to Russian aggression as the source of the [food crisis felt in Africa](#). The situation in Ukraine was referred to without argument with the Japanese position by most of the speakers representing individual countries and by others, including Moussa Faki, head of the AU Commission, and Amina Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary General from Kenya. By opposing the "forceful change in the status quo", Kishida said he was helping to alleviate the global effects of the war. He announced, among others, the ad hoc transfer of grains to Tunisia worth \$100 million, the grant of \$300 million for the AfDB instrument stimulating food production in African countries, and a broad qualification programme for farmers. With these actions, Japan is

indicating that that Russia, which in its rhetoric blames the "West" for causing the food crisis, does not offer solutions that will allow African states to become resistant to similar shocks in the future, and therefore is not a valuable partner for these countries.

**Importance of TICAD for the EU.** The TICAD summits are increasingly being used by Japan to present alternatives to Chinese initiatives in Africa that have been criticised by, among others, the EU and the U.S. as perpetuating China's economic domination and lowering the standards of good governance. At the same time, the effects of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, strongly felt in Africa via the food crisis, gave the Tunis conference the character of a declaration of commitment to the principles of respect for law and multilateralism. TICAD-8 was the largest forum in Africa since the outbreak of the war and one where criticism of Russia was heard, which was a breakthrough in relation to the [essentially neutral, and sometimes pro-Russia, attitude](#) of a large number of the continent's states. In the present context, Japan, traditionally considered to be one of the countries with a large, though secondary, influence in Africa, comparable to the UK, but far less than that of the U.S., France, the EU, or China, is trying to increase its political significance as a "representative" of the democratic world, defending its principles and good practices in Africa.

While Japan's development achievements are undeniable and the amount of new development resources announced during TICAD-8 is unexpectedly high, Japan will not significantly gain influence. There is no determination on the part of Japanese business to rapidly increase the scale of investments on the continent, which would increase this influence. The country's image is also damaged by large-scale catches—especially tuna—in the Indian Ocean, decimating fauna and damaging the economies of coastal states, which undermines the credibility of its environmental policies. Some of the Japanese initiatives are also detached from political reality: for example, for years Japan has supported financially the creation of an African Standby Force capable of intervening independently on behalf of the AU in conflicts on the continent. However, the differences in the interests of individual states and the lack of political will make it impossible to set it up.

Despite these limitations, Japan is a natural partner for the EU in Africa, where they have a common commitment to economic, human, and social development, as well as in values, standards of governance, and climate protection. Through cooperation in policy planning, for example in development, the EU could avoid duplicating Japanese activities of a similar nature. In the context of counteracting Russian influence in Africa, especially propaganda, it would be beneficial to cooperate more closely with partners like Japan in, for example coordinating the message addressed to high-level audiences.