Journal of **Asian Governance**
Volume 2 Issue 3 September 2025
DOI: 10.63851/001c.144277

Article

31-57

The Securitization of Foreign Aid:
The Case of Japan's ODA

Susumu Ito[1]

Abstract: Although Japan's official development assistance (ODA), a key foreign policy instrument, has been traditionally characterized by a heavy focus on infrastructure development through loan operations, the 1992 ODA Charter was revised in 2003 to incorporate human security as a core principle of Japanese ODA, establishing a nexus between development cooperation and security policy. However, the rise of China—particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative announced in 2013—and Japan's severe economic and fiscal situation have ushered in a new era of securitization of ODA. In 2022, Japan adopted a new National Security Strategy that stipulates the strategic use of ODA. The subsequent revision of the Development Cooperation Charter in 2023 marked a significant shift in Japanese foreign aid policy, emphasizing national interests and security. This study argues that the securitization of ODA, including economic security, represents the most significant change in recent Japanese ODA policy.

Keywords: Japan, Official Development Assistance (ODA), Quality Infrastructure, Securitization of Foreign Aid

1. Graduate School of International Studies and Regional Development, University of Niigata Prefecture, Japan
Correspondence Susumu Ito (s-ito@unii.ac.jp)

Introduction

With constitutional restrictions on the use of force as a means of settling international disputes and maintaining war potential, foreign aid or official development assistance (ODA) has become one of Japan's key foreign policy instruments. Japan's ODA has traditionally been characterized by a strong focus on economic infrastructure development through concessional loan operations with commercial and economic interests. However, a nexus between development cooperation and security policy emerged after the September 11, 2001 attacks. More recently, the rise of China—including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) announced in 2013—, Japan's severe economic and fiscal challenges, and the multiple crises faced by the global community (including infectious diseases such as COVID-19, climate change, wars and conflicts such as in Ukraine, and the debt crisis of developing countries caused by emerging donors) have ushered in a new era of securitization of Japanese ODA. This study analyzes how Japan's ODA has been modified to confront these developments.

In 2022, Japan adopted a new National Security Strategy that stipulates the strategic use of ODA. The subsequent revision of the Development Cooperation Charter in 2023 marked a significant shift in Japanese foreign aid policy, emphasizing national interests and security. This study argues that the securitization of ODA, including economic security, represents the most significant change in Japan's recent ODA policy, while the promotion of "quality infrastructure" through large-scale ODA loans has been actively advanced under the Free and Open Indo Pacific (FOIP) initiative.

The definition of ODA is clearly set by Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (DAC, n.d.). ODA flows are defined as grants and loans to the official sector of countries and territories on the DAC List of ODA Recipients, provided by official agencies with the main objective of promoting the economic development and welfare of developing countries, and characterized by concessional terms.[1]

The DAC also specified which forms of military aid and peacekeeping activities may be included as ODA. No military equipment or services are reportable as ODA, and anti-terrorism activities are

also excluded from consideration. However, the cost of using donors' armed forces to deliver humanitarian aid is eligible. With respect to peacekeeping, most expenditures are excluded in line with the general exclusion of military costs, though some narrowly defined, developmentally relevant activities within peacekeeping operations are included.

Unlike ODA, there is no established definition of *foreign aid*, although it is generally considered a broader concept. Foreign aid may encompass private charity, trade finance, and export credits, which fall outside the definition of ODA.

Literature Review

This section reviews the literature on the securitization of foreign aid in general, and specifically the securitization of Japan's foreign aid.

Securitization of Foreign Aid

There is no single, established definition of the securitization of foreign aid. Olivié and Pérez (2021) describe it as a process in which security considerations crowd out traditional development objectives, such as poverty reduction, while Bergmann (2017) explains it as the subordination of development policy to security objectives. Kilby (2012) identifies two dimensions of securitization: first, the reallocation of aid money to global security activities due to the war on terror, and second, the merging of development and security objectives, including cooperation between development agencies and the military. In this paper, the term *securitization of foreign aid* is used to describe the process and tendency of aid allocation based on the donor country's security concerns.

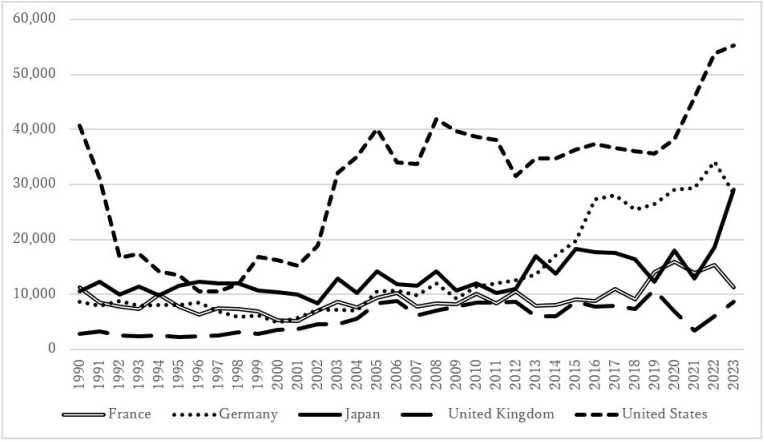
Although the securitization of foreign aid has been widely discussed over last two decades — particularly after the September 11, 2001 attacks — a nexus between development cooperation and security was already evident during the Cold War period (Spear, 2016). Morgenthau (1962) pointed out that "a policy of foreign aid is no different from diplomatic or military policy" (p. 309). Governments of developed countries utilized foreign aid within the context of superpower rivalry

(Buzan, 1997). Brown and Grävingholt (2016) argue that the foreign aid of major donors such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, has consistently been securitized, having been deployed for geostrategic purposes.

However, the securitization of foreign aid intensified after the September 11 attacks, although its intensity and forms have varied among donor countries (Brown & Grävingholt, 2016). The tendency to use aid donors' security concerns — often at the expense of developing countries' objectives — has become more pronounced, especially since the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Spear & Williams, 2012). It is important to note that during the Cold War, the dominant security rivalry was between capitalism or communism, whereas after September 11, threats to donor countries have come from global terrorism, conflict, and instability in the Global South. Against this backdrop, aid to fragile and failed states, including Afghanistan and Iraq, increased considerably. In response, the DAC issued policy statements on the role of development cooperation in helping to prevent support for terrorism (DAC, 2003).

Although research on securitization by the Copenhagen School relies mainly on the analysis of speeches and policy documents, Brown and Grävingholt (2016) examined the securitization of foreign aid by analyzing three aspects: (1) new discourses, (2) changes in flows and aid allocation, and (3) institutional innovations. Failed and fragile states and the "war on terror" exemplify new discourses, whereas increases in aid flows to fragile countries or related sectors represent changes in allocation. Institutional innovations include the creation of new offices coordinating development and military operations, or the subordination of development agencies under government ministries such as foreign affairs. Brown and Grävingholt also highlight "whole-of-government approaches" (p. 2), or integrated efforts across development and military institutions. The "3Ds" concept—defense, development, and diplomacy—adopted by the United States after September 11 is one such example.

Figure 1 illustrates ODA commitments by major donor countries between 1990 and 2023, showing a marked increase since 2001, especially in the United States. However, this rise may reflect not only the war on terrorism but also other factors, including responses to migration issues, the Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000, and the



Source. Created by the author using data from the Creditor Reporting System (CRS) of the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (OECD, 2025a)

Figure 1. ODA commitment by major donor countries between 1990 and 2023 (unit: million USD)

Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015.

In the case of the EU, in addition to the war on terrorism, concerns about migration, refugees, asylum, and border control—together with rising populist and nationalist movements—have prompted the securitization of foreign aid (Furness & Gänzle, 2016; Olivié & Pérez, 2021). In the 2010s, a new factor emerged in the securitization of foreign aid: the rise of China. The U.S.-China rivalry has further intensified the nexus between security and development (Larzillière, 2019).

Securitization of Japan's Foreign Aid

Compared with Europe and the United States, there have been relatively few studies on the securitization of Japan's foreign aid. Brown and Grävingholt (2016) describe Japan as "a country frequently ignored in studies of foreign aid" (p. 12). With regard to aid allocation to conflict-affected countries such as Cambodia, Afghanistan, and Sudan, Carvalho and Potter (2016) explain the nexus of security and development through peacebuilding and human-security approaches since the mid-

1990s. Although Japan's ODA has traditionally focused on economic development through infrastructure projects such as roads, railways, airports, and power generation, Yamamoto (2017) argues that the nexus between development cooperation and security policy in Japan's ODA gradually began in the 1990s.

Yamamoto (2017) further demonstrates the securitization of Japan's ODA, including the strengthening of coastguard agencies in Southeast Asia, in light of domestic political changes and ODA decision-making processes. Sugita (2017) discusses the background of securitization of foreign aid by explaining Japan's Development Cooperation Charter of 2015, which has been regarded as evidence of the securitization of Japan's ODA in the context of U.S.-Japan security relations and the U.S. pivot to the Asia-Pacific region. Shiga (2023) argues that, through securitizing ODA, Japan has emphasized universal values, such as the international rule of law, while downplaying domestic issues of democracy and human rights in developing countries with problematic governance records. However, few studies have examined the economic security dimensions of Japan's ODA securitization.

Historical Changes in Japan's ODA in Relation to Security

This section describes Japan's ODA in relation to security, including an overview of Japan's ODA, the nexus between development cooperation and security policy starting in the 21st century, and significant changes in the securitization of ODA since the 2010s.

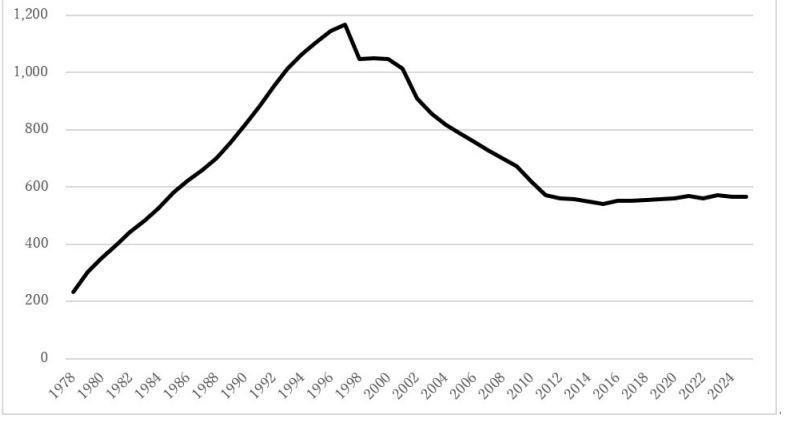
Overview of Japan's ODA

Japan began its ODA in 1954 with technical cooperation to South and Southeast Asia by joining the Colombo Plan. Financial Assistance was initiated in 1958. In 1964, Japan joined the OECD, and since then it has steadily increased its ODA volume. In 1977, the Japanese government announced a plan to double its ODA over the following five years. In 1978, following appreciation of the Japanese Yen, it announced its first medium-term target, which aimed to double ODA in three years.

Thereafter, five medium-term ODA targets were introduced, all aiming to double Japan's ODA volume. Consequently, Japan's ODA expanded significantly, and in 1989 it became the world's largest provider of ODA.

Japan's ODA has been characterized as heavily focused on economic infrastructure development through loan operations (Endo & Murashkin, 2023; Kato, 2016). This reflects the idea that infrastructure development is indispensable for economic growth (Sasada, 2019), based on Japan's own rapid development experience after World War II. With such characteristics, Japan's ODA has often been criticized for prioritizing economic and commercial benefits—such as paving the way for Japanese investment and exports—rather than addressing poverty reduction in recipient countries (Jain, 2016; Yoshimatsu, 2017). In official documents, the term *economic cooperation* was historically used instead of *development cooperation* to reflect government's vision of foreign aid.

Japan's national annual budget for ODA steadily increased and peaked at 1,169 billion JPY (8.4 billion USD[2]) in 1997 (Figure 2). However, after 1997, the budget gradually declined, reflecting Japan's severe fiscal and economic situation. The downward trend leveled off in 2015, as discussed later.



Source. Created by the author using data from ODA, extracted from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2025)

Figure 2. Annual national budget[3] of Japan's ODA (unit: billion JPY)

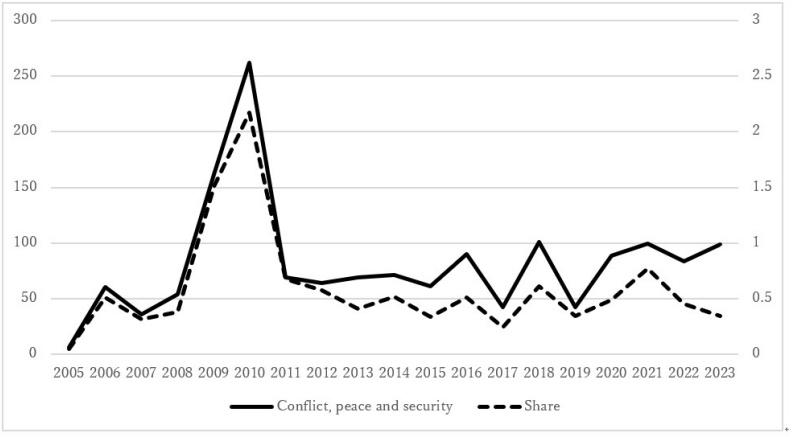
Nexus between Development Cooperation and Security Policy in Japan's ODA

One of the characteristics of Japan's ODA, compared to that of Western donor countries, is that it emphasizes supporting the self-help efforts of developing countries based on their requests. Although this approach has been praised for respecting the ownership of these countries, it has also been criticized for lacking clear initiatives and guiding principles. Following the military coup in Myanmar in 1988 and a series of political upheavals in East Asia in the late 1980s, Japan—then the top donor to these countries and, by 1989, the world's largest provider of ODA—came under pressure to formulate a basic policy for its aid. Against this backdrop, the Japanese government announced the first ODA guidelines in 1991, which emphasized four points in implementing ODA: (1) trends in the military expenditures of recipient countries, (2) trends in the development and production of weapons of mass destruction and missiles, (3) arms imports and exports, and (4) efforts to promote democratization, introduce a market-oriented economy, and ensure respect of basic human rights and freedoms.

These principles reflected Japan's policy of not providing military assistance and not allowing ODA funds to be used for military purposes. The fundamental policy for Japan's ODA, known as the ODA Charter, was first approved by the cabinet in 1992, incorporating these four guidelines. One motivation for creating the ODA Charter was domestic and international criticism of Japan's ODA for its strong economic and commercial orientation and lack of an overarching philosophy. However, at this stage, Japan's ODA was mainly concerned with economic interests rather than security issues.

Following the economic downturn caused by the collapse of the bubble economy, the Japanese government experienced a fiscal crisis. In 1997, it announced a policy of shift from quantitative expansion to qualitative improvement of its ODA. Consequently, as shown in Figure 2, the ODA budget was reduced by 10% in 1998 compared with the previous fiscal year, and the decline continued thereafter. In addition to improving quality, there was growing interest in providing ODA from a more strategic perspective.

Against this backdrop, the ODA Charter of 1992 was revised in 2003. The perspective of human security became one of the basic



Source. Created by the author using data from the CRS of the OECD (OECD, 2025a)

Figure 3. Japan's ODA commitment to conflict, peace and security (2005–2022) (million USD: left axis) and share of conflict, peace and security in Japan's total ODA (%: right axis)

policies under the 2003 Charter. Peacebuilding was added to the list of priority issues, reflecting the war on terrorism after the September 11, 2001 attacks. With this revision, social development—including poverty reduction, education, health, and social protection—was promoted under the framework of human security. Carvalho and Potter (2016) describe this as the "human securitization of Japan's foreign aid" (p. 99). During this period, the national interest in ODA centered on security against international terrorism. Examples of such assistance include support for strengthening police capability and reintegrating former soldiers into society in Afghanistan, as well as reconstruction activities such as rehabilitating and building key infrastructure, including power plants, seaports, water and sanitation systems, and public safety facilities in Iraq.

One way to demonstrate the securitization in aid flow is to show allocation to the security-related sector, which is the "conflict, peace and security sector" in the Creditor Reporting System (CRS) of the OECD (Figure 3). However, Figure 3 does not necessarily show a substantial increase in aid allocation to the security-related sectors. This is partly

because security-related ODA, including support for coast guard agencies in Southeast Asian countries, has been reported for other sectors, such as the transport sector.

Significant Changes in Japan's ODA since the 2010s

The utilization of ODA funds for security objectives became widely observed in the 2010s, including the provision of patrol vessels to the Philippine Coast Guard, driven by the external security environment, particularly the rise of China and the intensified maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas (Yamamoto, 2017; Yoshimatsu, 2017). Simultaneously, China rapidly expanded its foreign aid, especially in infrastructure development in developing countries. This was accompanied by the announcement of the BRI in 2013, the creation of the New Development Bank (formerly BRICS Bank) in 2014, and the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2016.

Following these developments, Japan announced its first National Security Strategy (NSS) in 2013. The NSS presented guidelines for policies in areas related to ODA, as well as the sea, outer space, cyberspace, and energy. Based on this framework, the ODA Charter was revised in 2015 to also cover changes in international and domestic environments. The Charter was renamed the Development Cooperation Charter to cover non-ODA development-related cooperation, such as cooperation by the private sector and other official flows (OOF). The new Charter introduced terms such as *national interest* and *proactive contribution to peace* for the first time. It emphasized "quality growth," defined as inclusive, sustainable, and resilient growth, as a top priority. The term "quality" was added to highlight Japan's differentiation from infrastructure and growth promoted under the BRI. Notably, the 2015 Charter permitted assistance to armed forces or in recipient countries for nonmilitary purposes such as public welfare and disaster-relief. This marked a substantial departure from Japan's traditional nonmilitary principles in ODA policy.

The 2013 NSS was revised in 2022 to address changes in global challenges, including China's assertiveness in the East and South China Seas and the war in Ukraine. The new NSS explicitly referred to the *strategic use of ODA and other forms of international cooperation*.

Although the 2013 NSS presented guidelines for policies in areas related to ODA, the new 2022 NSS revision explicitly subordinated ODA to the national security strategy, underscoring the shift from development objectives toward security objectives.

Building on the 2022 NSS revision and in response to the "polycrisis" faced by the global community—including COVID-19, climate change, conflicts, and the debt crises of developing countries—the 2015 Development Cooperation Charter was revised in 2023. Global economic security concerns, such as supply chain disruptions caused by COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine, also prompted the revision of the Development Cooperation Charter. Although the 2015 Charter mentioned *national interest*, the 2023 Charter elevated national interest to the fundamental objective of ODA for the first time. It declared: "[The] government will implement development cooperation, one of the most important tools of diplomacy, in a more strategic, effective, and sustainable manner to create a more favorable international environment for the world and for Japan" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2023, p. 4).

The 2023 Development Cooperation Charter set out two objectives of development cooperation: (1) to contribute proactively to the formation of a peaceful, stable, and prosperous international community—in other words, to promote international public interests—and (2) to advance Japan's national interests.

The new Charter also stipulated that development cooperation, including ODA, will promote the FOIP, launched in 2016 at the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development in Nairobi, Kenya. FOIP is a foreign policy initiative advocated by Japan that aims to achieve peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region under a free and open international order.

Examples of such assistance include the provision of patrol vessels to Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, mainly through concessional ODA loans tied to Japanese companies. Among these cases, the Philippines illustrates the development-security nexus in the 2010s. As the country has an ongoing territorial dispute with China and is situated in a strategically important location, Japan has provided a series of patrol vessels and capacity-building assistance to the Philippine Coast Guard through ODA. Additionally, Japan's Ministry of Defense transferred air surveillance radar systems to the Philippines in 2024 as the first provision

of equipment following the 2014 revision of Japan's Three Principles on the Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology.[4] Furthermore, additional defense equipment has also been provided through Official Security Assistance (OSA), as discussed in Section 4.5.

Discussion

This section discusses the characteristics of the securitization of Japan's ODA from the following perspectives: (1) institutional changes, (2) economic security, (3) support for economic infrastructure development, (4) the volume of the ODA budget, and (5) OSA.

Institutional Changes

Policies and programming of Japan's ODA have traditionally been discussed among bureaucrats of three key ministries — the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry — as well as officials of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Japan's government development cooperation agency, which is "strongly protected from political and civil society influence" (Yamamoto, 2017, p. 77). The decision-making process for ODA was described as "highly decentralized/fragmented" (Sasada, 2019, p. 1066).

Since the 2010s, however, the Prime Minister's Office has become the most influential actor in decision-making, regarding not only ODA policy but also programming and project selection. A key development was the establishment in 2013 of a Ministerial Meeting on Strategy relating to Infrastructure Export and Economic Cooperation. This body comprised relevant cabinet ministers and was chaired by the Chief Cabinet Secretary; it aimed to capture infrastructure demand, mainly in emerging countries, and promote the export of Japanese infrastructure systems. Following its creation, important infrastructure projects were reported by the relevant ministries and JICA to the monthly *Infrastructure Monitoring Committee* chaired by the Prime Minister's Advisor. In these meetings, the Prime Minister's Office provided instructions when necessary.

Another important institutional change was the establishment of the Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs in 2014. Located within the Cabinet Secretariat under the Chief Cabinet Secretary, the Bureau serves as the secretariat for the Prime Minister in deciding senior personnel appointments across ministries and agencies, including vice ministers and bureau chiefs. Previously, each ministry or agency proposed candidates for senior positions, which were then approved by the Prime Minister's Office. The creation of the Bureau aimed to shift this to a system of Prime Minister-led cross-ministerial appointments.

With these changes, the decision-making process has become more integrated rather than fragmented, and more firmly centered in the Prime Minister's Office. This shift exemplifies the *whole-of-government approaches* described by Brown and Grävingholt (2016) and noted by the OECD (2014, p. 14) in its peer review of Japan's ODA administration.

Economic Security

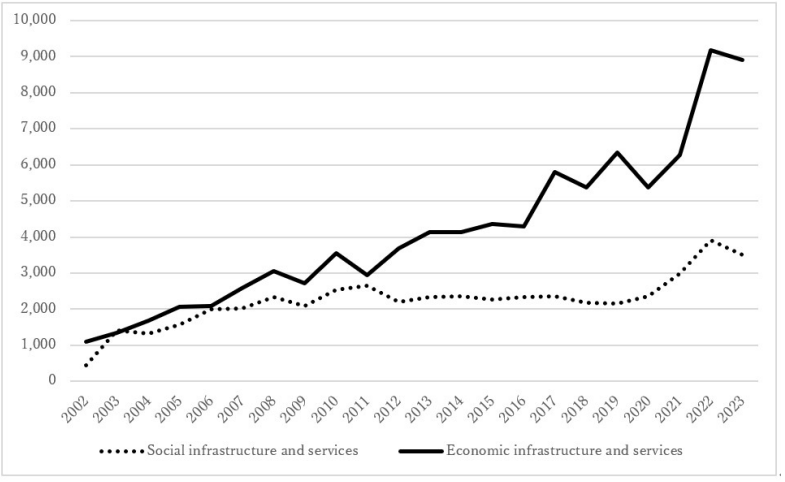
Although it has been debated that the emphasis of Japan's ODA shifted from national economic interests to the national security in the 2010s (Yoshimatsu, 2017), economic security became a clear priority in the 2023 Development Cooperation Charter. Whereas "quality growth" has already been mentioned in the 2015 Charter, the 2023 version broadened this concept to include "strengthening socioeconomic autonomy and resilience, including food and energy," "digital" (including cybersecurity), and "quality infrastructure" as central elements of the first priority policy of "quality growth." The 2023 Charter explicitly linked Japan's economic interests to ODA, stating: "The enhancement of resilience and diversification of supply chains, sustainable development of critical mineral resources, and stable supply and security of food are important not only for the sustainable growth of developing countries, but also for Japan" (p. 8). This economic securitization of ODA had not been observed in earlier Charters. The 2023 Charter also highlighted the private sector as a key player, noting: "Japan will pursue more effective development cooperation with various development cooperation partners by promoting the mobilization of private-sector finance, including strengthening collaboration with the private sector and government agencies handling OOF" (p. 20).

Building on the 2023 Charter, the "New Strategy Framework Looking Ahead to 2030" was endorsed by the Ministerial Meeting on Strategy relating to Infrastructure Export and Economic Cooperation in 2024. This Strategy set three priorities: (1) enhance the international competitiveness of the Japanese private sector to pave the way for a prosperous future for the world; (2) work closely with the Global South to strengthen supply chains and ensure economic security, including through infrastructure development, thereby protecting Japan's national interest; and (3) view global social changes such as greening, decarbonization, and digital transformation as major growth markets and opportunities leading to sustainable growth in Japan and worldwide. The Strategy stipulates that the government will actively participate in important infrastructure projects and support them through a combination of public funds, such as ODA, and private funds, in order to ensure economic security. These priorities are in line with the 2023 Charter.

The 2023 Development Cooperation Charter therefore marks a new phase in Japan's development cooperation policy, as it has explicitly sought to realize national economic interests. This revision has paved the way for the strategic use of ODA to strengthen Japan's economic security and enhance the international competitiveness of Japanese companies. This shift demonstrates that Japan's ODA is no longer just a tool for development aid but is increasingly positioned as a strategic resource for achieving Japan's national economic objectives, integrated with its external and domestic economic policies.

Support for Economic Infrastructure Development

In relation to the economic securitization of ODA, and under the 2015 and 2023 Development Cooperation Charters together with the promotion of FOIP, Japanese ODA returned to its classical Model with a renewed focus on economic infrastructure through concessional loans. As many countries in the Indo-Pacific region suffer from infrastructure deficits, and as infrastructure support has long been one of Japan's ODA core competencies, allocations to economic infrastructure have steadily increased. The *New Plan for FOIP* introduced in 2023 established four pillars of cooperation: (1) Principles for Peace and Rules for Prosperity, which includes quality infrastructure investment; (2) Addressing



Source. Created by the author using data from the CRS of the OECD (OECD, 2025a)

Figure 4. Japan's ODA Disbursement for Social and Economic Infrastructure (2002–2023) (unit: million USD)

Challenges in an Indo-Pacific Way; (3) Multi-layered Connectivity; and (4) Efforts for Security and Safe Use of the Sea to the Air. Infrastructure development is explicitly mentioned as a focal area in the FOIP.

Figure 4 illustrates trends in economic infrastructure (rail, roads, airports, and power) and social infrastructure (water, sewerage, schools, hospitals) within Japan's ODA. Among these two sectors, economic infrastructure, which Japan has prioritized, has grown rapidly, particularly since the 2015 Charter revision. This provision of economic infrastructure through concessional ODA loans also contributes to revitalizing Japan's domestic economy, as many quality infrastructure projects are tied to Japanese prime contractors. Additionally, Japan's extensive support for infrastructure development in the region serves to counterbalance infrastructure assistance through the BRI. The FOIP and BRI can therefore be viewed as representing competing approaches to economic infrastructure investment.

The concept of quality infrastructure was developed in the context of competition with China's infrastructure support, particularly the BRI. In May 2016, during G7 Ise-Shima Summit, where Japan held

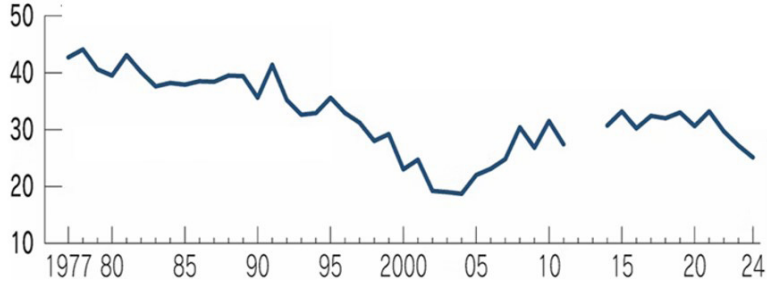
the G7 presidency, Japan initiated the announcement of the *G7 Ise-Shima Principles for Promoting Quality Infrastructure Investment*. The Principles include: (1) effective governance and reliable operation; (2) economic efficiency in view of life-cycle costs; (3) safety and resilience against natural disasters, terrorism, and cyber-attack risks; (4) ensuring job creation, capacity building, and the transfer of expertise and know-how to local communities; and (5) addressing social and environmental impacts (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2016).

Building on this, Japan also initiated the endorsement of the *G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment* at the G20 Osaka Summit in 2019, where it held the G20 presidency. These Principles, regarded as an advanced form of the G7 Principles, consist of: (1) sustainable growth and development, (2) economic efficiency, (3) environmental considerations, (4) resilience against natural disasters, (5) social considerations, and (6) infrastructure governance (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2019). The sixth principle, infrastructure governance, includes *openness and transparency, anti-corruption efforts,* and *debt sustainability*, with China in mind. *Openness and transparency* not only refers to ensuring fair procurement practices that do not require the use of domestic companies or labor but also guaranteeing that completed infrastructure facilities operate transparently and remain accessible to all users. Regarding *debt sustainability*, the Principles highlight both macro-level debt management, avoiding debt accumulation or "debt traps" in developing countries, and financial sustainability at the project level.

By clarifying this position, Japan signals that its infrastructure construction assistance is superior to China's. The aim of these principles is to check China's infrastructure development assistance, including the BRI, which is theorized to be causing excessive debt problems in emerging countries according to Western perspectives. In other words, the Japanese government is aiming to differentiate its aid approach from China's by promoting and establishing the *quality infrastructure* concept as an international standard.

Volume of ODA Budget

The ODA budget bottomed out in 2015 and has since avoided further decline, showing a slight upward trend, as illustrated in Figure



Source. Created by the author using data from the Cabinet Office of Japan (2025)

Figure 5. Results of Foreign Policy Opinion Survey in Japan on Development Cooperation who answered Development Cooperation should be actively pursued (unit: %)[5]

2. This development coincides with the revision of the Charter in 2015 and suggests that the ODA budget has been justified from the perspective of securitization. In other words, security concerns, particularly the rise of China, have helped legitimize Japan's ODA budget despite its severe fiscal and economic situation. This interpretation aligns with Brown and Grävingholt's (2016) discussion of new discourses on the securitization of foreign aid.

This trend also coincides with results from the Cabinet Office of Japan's *Foreign Policy Opinion Survey* on Development Cooperation, in which responders agreed that "development cooperation should be actively pursued" (Figure 5). Approval rate of Japan's ODA reached its highest level after the 2015 Charter revision, nearly two decades later. However, the most recent sharp decline in approval may reflect citizens' sentiments toward ODA in the context of severe economic conditions and high inflation, particularly in relation to food prices.

Official Security Assistance (OSA)

The 2022 National Security Strategy stipulated that "a new cooperation framework for the benefit of armed forces and other related organizations will be established" (Government of Japan, 2022, p.

17). Following this, the Japanese government created OSA in 2023 to deepen security cooperation with like-minded countries. Under the OSA framework, nonlethal military equipment and supplies are provided to developing countries on a grant basis to strengthen their security and deterrence capabilities.

OSA is not part of ODA and operates under a different framework. The 2023 *Development Cooperation Charter,* which was adopted after OSA's establishment, does not mention OSA. However, both OSA and ODA are administrated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs rather than the Ministry of Defense. OSA was established to address the restrictions placed on by Japan's nonmilitary principle.

Since 2023, OSA has been extended to countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Mongolia, Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, and Tonga. Supported equipment and supplies include coastal radar systems, rescue boats, patrol boats, air surveillance radars, and air traffic control systems. The OSA budget was approximately 2 billion JPY (14 million USD) in 2023; it increased to approximately 5 billion JPY (36 million USD) in 2024 and is projected to be roughly 8 billion JPY (57 million USD) in 2025.

Japan's ODA is governed by a nonmilitary principle that prohibits assistance for military applications, restricting aid to the civilian sector. For example, if an airport is used by both the military and civilians, ODA only supports civilian facilities. By contrast, OSA enables Japan to assist with dual-use infrastructure and facilities, allowing more flexible support tailored to recipient countries' needs.

However, the boundary between "military" (to be supported by OSA), and "nonmilitary" (to be supported by ODA), has become increasingly blurred. The 2023 Charter[6] emphasizes seamless support for peacebuilding, but further study is needed to clarify the demarcation between ODA and OSA. This challenge is compounded by the fact that both frameworks are implemented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As the OSA budget expands in the future, situations may also arise in which ODA and OSA budgets compete with one another.

Conclusions and Further Considerations

This study analyzes how Japan's ODA has been modified in response to developments such as the September 11, 2001 attacks and the subsequent war on terrorism, Japan's severe economic and fiscal situation, and the rise of China, including the BRI. Although Japan's ODA, one of its key foreign policy instruments, constrained by constitutional military restrictions, has long been characterized by a focus on economic infrastructure development through loan operations, a nexus between development cooperation and security policy has emerged. Recent developments, including China's assertiveness in the East and South China Seas and the war in Ukraine, have drawn Japan into a new era of ODA securitization. The revision of the Development Cooperation Charter in 2023 marks a significant shift in Japanese foreign aid policies through its emphasis on national interests and security. This study argues that the securitization of ODA, including economic securitization, represents the most significant change in Japan's recent ODA policy, whereas the promotion of "quality infrastructure" through large-scale ODA loans has also been actively advanced under the FOIP initiative.

Security cooperation is required to achieve short-term goals such as building relationships with defense authorities and ensuring Japan's presence in the region. By contrast, development projects require a longer timeframe. Large-scale infrastructure projects, for example, may take more than a decade to complete, including feasibility studies, environmental assessment, design, procurement, construction, and eventual operation and maintenance. Securitization of foreign aid risks undermining the trust Japan has built with developing countries because of the difference in timescales between development perspectives and security. There is concern that the securitization of Japan's ODA may negatively affect the development effectiveness of its ODA through a short-sighted pursuit of national interests.

In 2025, reductions in ODA have been announced in several DAC member countries. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), founded in 1961 and historically responsible for one-quarter of the world's ODA, was officially closed and absorbed into the State Department in July 2025. The same year, the United States also announced major ODA reductions, partly to finance a new USD 2.9

billion "America First Opportunities Fund" to strengthen national security priorities (Pamuk, 2025). In the United Kingdom, which previously reached an ODA budget equivalent to 0.7% of its gross national income (GNI),[7] announced in February 2025 that ODA spending would be reduced from 0.5% to 0.3% of GNI by 2027, reallocating funds toward defense and security-related spending (Loft & Brien, 2025).

According to the OECD (2025b), global ODA is expected to fall by 9%–17% in 2025, following a 9% decline in 2024, the first drop in six years. The 2025 reduction stems from largely deep cuts in four major providers: France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States,–which together account for approximately two-thirds of global ODA. Additionally, seven DAC members have publicly announced cuts extending through 2027 (OECD, 2025b).

This study examines the securitization of foreign aid through the case of Japan's ODA. However, as shown above, foreign aid itself is already in decline, partly due to its reallocation toward security-related budgets. With domestic economies stagnating, national budgets under strain, the global balance of power shifting, and international competition intensifying, governments are increasingly required to justify to their citizens the large amounts of ODA funded by taxpayers' money. Under these pressures, the securitization of foreign aid may be entering a new phase.

Notes

1 Starting with the 2018 data, the definition of ODA has employed the notion of *the ODA grant equivalent*, which measures donor effort. Until 2017, the threshold for concessionality was a grant element of at least 25%. Under the current system, the required grant element varies from 10% to 45%, depending on the income classification of recipient countries.

2 Based on 1 USD = 140 JPY

3 This is the initial budget, which excludes the supplemental budget.

4 The revision introduced new principles on the overseas transfer of defense equipment and technology, replacing the *Three Principles on Arms Exports and Their Related Policy Guidelines*, which had prohibited arms exports from Japan in principle. The new principles specify the conditions under which Japan may transfer defense equipment and technology to other countries, marking a shift from a general prohibition on arms exports to permitting transfers of defense equipment and

technology under specific circumstances.

5 There were no similar questions about ODA in 2012 or 2013.

6 "Japan will comprehensively address the various causes of conflict and instability and will provide seamless support for peacebuilding while taking into account the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus approach" (p. 9).

7 The United Nations has a target for countries to spend 0.7% of their GNI on their ODA.

References

Bergmann, J. (2017). *Capacity building in support of security and development (CBSD): Securitizing EU development policy?* Briefing Paper No. 24/2017. Bonn: Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE).

Brown, S., & Grävingholt, J. (Eds.). (2016). *The securitization of foreign aid*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Buzan, B. (1997). Rethinking security after the cold war. *Cooperation and Conflict*, *32*(1), 5-28.

Cabinet Office of Japan. (2025). *Foreign policy opinion survey.* Retrieved April 20, 2025, from https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/diplomacy_defense/202502/r06/r06-gaiko/ (in Japanese)

Carvalho, P. A. R., & Potter, D. M. (2016). Peacebuilding and the 'human securitization'of Japan's foreign aid. In S. Brown & J. Grävingholt (Eds.), *The securitization of foreign aid* (pp. 85-112). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Development Assistance Committee, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2003). *A development co-operation lens on terrorism prevention: Key entry points for action*: Paris: Author.

Development Assistance Committee, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (n.d.). *Official development assistance – definition and coverage.* Retrieved April 15, 2025, from https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/oda-eligibility-and-conditions/official-development-assistance--definition-and-coverage.html

Endo, K., & Murashkin, N. (2023). Japan's infrastructure export and development cooperation: The role of ODA loan projects in the 2010s. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, *77*(2), 129-149.

Furness, M., & Gänzle, S. (2016). The European Union's development policy: A balancing act between 'a more comprehensive approach' and creeping securitization. In S. Brown & J. Grävingholt (Eds.), *The securitization of foreign aid* (pp. 138-162). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Government of Japan. (2022). *National security strategy.* Tokyo: Author.

Jain, P. (2016). Japan's foreign aid: Old and new contests. *The Pacific Review*, *29*(1), 93-113.

Kato, H. (2016). Japan's ODA 1954-2014: Changes and continuities in a central instrument in Japan's foreign policy. In Y. Shimomura, J. Page, & H. Kato (Eds.), *Japan's development assistance: Foreign aid and the post-2015 agenda* (pp.

1-18). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Kilby, P. (2012). The changing development landscape in the first decade of the 21st century and its implications for development studies. *Third World Quarterly*, *33*(6), 1001-1017.

Larzillière, P. (2019). The discourse of security in development policies: A genealogical approach to "Security Sector Reform". *Development Policy Review*, *37*(3), 384-401.

Loft, P. & Brien, P. (2025). *UK aid: Reducing spending to 0.3% of GNI by 2027/28*. House of Commons Library. London: Author.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2016). *G7 Ise-Shima principles for promoting quality infrastructure investment.* Tokyo: Author.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2019). *G20 principles for quality infrastructure investment.* Tokyo: Author.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2023). *Development cooperation charter.* Tokyo: Author.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2025). *ODA dataset.* Retrieved April 3, 2025 from https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryo/yosan.html

Morgenthau, H. (1962). A political theory of foreign aid. *American Political Science Review*, *56*(2), 301-309.

Olivié, I., & Pérez, A. (2021). Whose and what aid securitisation? An analysis of EU aid narratives and flows. *Third World Quarterly*, *42*(8), 1903-1922.

OECD. (2014). *OECD Development co-operation peer reviews: Japan 2014*. Paris: Author.

OECD. (2025a). *Dataset: Creditor reporting system (CRS).* Retrieved April 3, 2025, from https://dataexplorer.oecd.org/?fs[0]=Topic%2C1%7CDevelopment%23DEV%23%7COfficial%20Development%20Assistance%20%28ODA%29%23DEV_ODA%23&pg=0&fc=Topic&bp=true&snb=26

OECD. (2025b). *Cuts in official development assistance: OECD projections for 2025 and the near term, OECD Policy Briefs*. Paris: Author.

Pamuk, H. (2025). Trump administration scraps over 80% of USAID programs, top diplomat Rubio says. *Reuters*

Sasada, H. (2019). Resurgence of the "Japan Model"?. *Asian Survey*, *59*(6), 1044-1069.

Shiga, H. (2023). The new dynamics of Japan's Official Development Assistance in an era of great power competition. *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, *12*(1), 249-263.

Spear, J. (2016). The militarization of United States foreign aid. In S. Brown & J. Grävingholt (Eds.), *The securitization of foreign aid* (pp. 18-41). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Spear, J., & Williams, P. D. (Eds.). (2012). *Security and development in global politics: A critical comparison*. Georgetown University Press.

Sugita, C. Y. (2017). The US pivot to Asia and Japan's Development Cooperation Charter. In A. Asplund & M. Söderberg (Eds.), *Japanese development cooperation: The making of an aid architecture pivoting to Asia* (pp. 106-119). Routledge.

Yamamoto, R. (2017). The securitization of Japan's ODA: New strategies in changing regional and domestic contexts. In A. Asplund & M. Söderberg (Eds.) *Japanese*

development cooperation: The making of an aid architecture pivoting to Asia (pp. 72-89). Routledge.

Yoshimatsu, H. (2017). Japan's export of infrastructure systems: pursuing twin goals through developmental means. *The Pacific Review*, *30*(4), 494-512.

对外援助的安全化：日本ODA的案例

摘要: 日本的政府开发援助(ODA)作为其外交政策的重要工具，传统上主要以贷款方式支持基础设施建设。然而，1992年的《ODA大纲》在2003年被修订，将“人类安全”纳入日本ODA的核心原则，从而在发展合作与安全政策之间建立了联系。然而，以2013年公布的“一带一路”倡议为代表的中国的崛起，以及日本国内严峻的经济财政状况，标志着日本ODA进入了安保化的新阶段。2022年，日本通过了新的《国家安全战略》，明确规定ODA的战略性运用。随后在2023年，《开发合作大纲》的修订标志着日本对外援助政策的重大转折，更加强调国家利益与安全。本研究认为，包括经济安全在内的ODA安全化，是近年来日本ODA政策中最重要的变化。

关键词: 日本、政府开发援助(ODA)、高质量基础设施、对外援助安全化

대외원조의 안보화: 일본 ODA를 사례로

초록: 일본의 주요 외교정책 수단 중 하나인 정부개발원조(ODA)는 엔차관을 통한 인프라 정비를 중시해 온 것이 특징으로 평가되어 왔다. 그러나 1992년에 제정된 ODA 대강령이 2003년에 개정되면서, 개발협력과 안보정책의 연계 속에서 인간안보가 ODA의 기본정책으로 포함되었다. 이후 2013년에 발표된 일대일로 구상을 비롯한 중국의 부상과 국내의 엄격한 경제·재정 상황은 일본 ODA의 안보화에서 새로운 전개를 보여주었다. 2022년에는 ODA의 전략적 활용을 규정한 새로운 국가안보전략이 제정되었고, 이어서 2023년 개발협력대강령의 개정은 국익과 안보를 중시하는 방향으로 이루어져 일본의 대외원조정책에 큰 전환을 가져왔다. 본 논문은 경제안보를 포함한 ODA의 안보화야말로 최근 일본 ODA 정책에서 가장 중요한 변화임을 논한다.

주제어: 일본, 정부개발원조(ODA), 질 높은 인프라, 대외원조의 안보화

対外援助の安全保障化: 日本のODAを事例として

要旨: 日本の主要外交政策手段の一つである政府開発援助(ODA)は、円借款によるインフラ整備への重視が特徴とされてきたが、1992年に策定されたODA大綱が2003年に改定され、開発協力と安全保障政策の連携として、人間の安全保障がODAの基本政策として盛り込まれた。しかし、2013年に発表された一帯一路構想をはじめとする中国の台頭と、国内の厳しい経済財政状況は、日本のODAの安全保障化における新たな展開を示している。2022年には、ODAの戦略的活用を規定した新たな国家安全保障戦略が策定され、その後、2023年の開発協力大綱の改定は、国益と安全保障を重視するものとなり、日本の対外援助政策に大きな転換をもたらすものとなった。本稿は、経済安全保障を含むODAの安全保障化こそが、近年の日本のODA政策における最も重要な変化であると論じる。

キーワード: 日本、政府開発援助(ODA)、質の高いインフラ、対外援助の安全保障化

Author biography

Susumu Ito, Ph.D. is a Professor of the Graduate School of International Studies and Regional Development, University of Niigata Prefecture, Japan. His research interests include infrastructure development and Public-Private Partnership (PPP) in developing countries and Official Development Assistance (ODA). Recent publications include "Infrastructure Development and Public-Private Partnership: The Case of the Philippines" (2022) by Springer and "Philippines-Japan Relations in Infrastructure Development of the Philippines" (2025) by Routledge.