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Japan's New "principles" For Evaluating Foreign Aid Requests

by Barbara Khol

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On July 28, the Japanese government made public a supplement to "principles" guiding overseas development aid (ODA). The document states that "any use of ODA for military purposes or for aggravation of international conflicts should be avoided." Next, Japanese officials are to take note of "trends in recipient countries' military expenditures, development and production of mass destruction weapons and missiles, export and import of arms etc..." Developing countries are advised to place "appropriate priorities" in resource allocation on economic and social development. The Japanese ODA charter also states that attention must also be focused on "efforts for promoting democratization, introduction of a market-oriented economy, and the situation regarding the security of basic human rights and freedoms in the recipient country." Japan's new guidelines are similar to those of other nations such as Germany, Netherlands, US, Britain, Sweden and Norway, who link foreign aid with "good governance." The new catchword goes beyond conditionality as traditionally advocated by multilateral financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Devaluation, privatization and the elimination of government subsidies are accompanied by new conditions: multi-party elections, free and fair voting and respect for human rights. At present, Japan is one of the world's major aid donors. Tokyo displaced the US for first place in 1990. For the past few years, Japanese military spending averaged US\$30 billion per annum. Japan's constitution renounces war as a means of settling international disputes. However, a military modernization program calls for military spending of over US\$171 billion during a five-year period. (Source: Inter Press Service, 07/28/92)

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