



Iraq and Japan's Economic Diplomacy: The Ebb and Flow of Bilateral Relations Pre and Post-2003

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Abstract

This article explores why and how economic diplomacy emerged between Japan and Iraq pre and post-2003. It draws on primary sources, including data from the Observatory of Economic Complexity and Japan's Trade Statistics, as well as official documents including from the ministries of foreign affairs of Japan and Iraq. The evolution of bilateral relations has been traced through five stages. The formative period from the 1920s to the Second World War; the post-war era until the close of the 1960s; the following decades of the 1970s and 1980s; The 1990s, when Iraq was under UN sanctions; and Iraq-Japan relations post-Saddam. These stages are examined using Maaïke Okano-Heijmans' conceptual framework of economic diplomacy, which includes three dimensions: context (domestic, regional, and international factors), tools (such as aid, trade, or sanctions), and processes (negotiations and communication) that explain the emergence and role of economic diplomacy between Iraq and Japan. Since 1920, Iraq and Japan have retained commercial ties, and economic diplomacy materialised after the Second World War. Since then, bilateral relations have fluctuated, facing different crises, such as the 1973 oil crisis and increased trade throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the UN sanctions marked the lowest point in bilateral relations. Finally, post-Saddam, economic diplomacy between Iraq and Japan has intensified, including Japan's aid to Iraq, its expanding diplomatic presence in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the resumption of trade, and the growth of Japan's investment in Iraq's infrastructure. Bilateral challenges linger due to Iraq's precarious political and security situation, lack of transparency and poor bureaucratic bodies. Additionally, Japan is increasingly diversifying its energy sources and expanding its renewable energy capacity, thereby reducing trade with Iraq.

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Introduction

This study explores Japan-Iraq relations before and after 2003, examining the emergence of economic diplomacy between the two countries as one of the most understudied bilateral relations. This case explores the nexus between Japan and Iraq during crises, such as the 1973 oil crisis, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and the 2003 Iraq War and its aftermath, and how these crises shaped their bilateral economic diplomacy. Here, the question is: Why and how has economic diplomacy materialised between Japan and Iraq before and post-2003? The article explores the emergence of economic diplomacy across five stages of bilateral relations between Iraq and Japan and finds the following. First, prior to the mid-1950s, economic diplomacy was almost non-existent. Second, in the 1960s, when the diplomatic representations were upgraded, and bilateral relations were elevated, some aspects of economic diplomacy surfaced. Third, in the 1970s and 1980s, economic diplomacy was fully operationalised and faced threats such as the 1973 oil crisis. Fourth, the 1990s witnessed extensive use of negative instruments of economic diplomacy, such as sanctions against Iraq. Fifth, post-2003, the ties saw the re-emergence of economic diplomacy in its full capacity, embracing a wide range of positive instruments. Another key finding of this article is the five tables and charts that illustrate the flow and bilateral trade between Japan and Iraq from the middle of stage three onwards, as well as Japan's trade with the Middle East since the 1980s. The article employs Maaïke Okano-Heijmans's conceptual framework of economic diplomacy [1, 2], focusing on its three dimensions: First, context (e.g., geopolitics), second, positive (e.g., state visits and agreements) and negative (e.g., embargos) instruments, and third, processes (e.g., negotiations). These three dimensions underpin economic diplomacy between Iraq and Japan.

Context shapes when instruments could be deployed and processes occur. For example, positive instruments and processes re-emerged post-2003 between Iraq and Japan due to new geopolitical and global contexts, particularly the toppling of Saddam's regime, the establishment of a new regime in Iraq, and the removal of UN sanctions. The article argues that economic diplomacy has existed in Iraq-Japan relations since the postwar era, with periods of disruption due to the changes in the context. Furthermore, processes and various instruments have shaped bilateral relations from the second stage onwards. The paper first examines the relevant literature on economic diplomacy and Iraq-Japan relations. Thereafter, the conceptual framework of economic diplomacy is explained. The following sections analyse the five stages of economic diplomacy in Japan-Iraq bilateral ties.

Literature Review and a Conceptual Framework of Economic Diplomacy

Economic diplomacy is a relatively new term; its use in governmental documents dates back to archives in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century [3]. 19th-century neoclassical economists like David Ricardo opposed government intervention in international trade, investments, and subsidies, now known as economic diplomacy. However, cases such as the British-Portuguese trade, formalised in the 1703 Methuen Treaty, demonstrated the role of economic diplomacy. [4] The term "economic diplomacy" gained academic traction in the mid-1950s, appeared intermittently in the

1960s, and steadily increased in use throughout the 1990s. Its usage peaked around 2010, reaching approximately a thousand scientific papers annually. Scholars from International Relations, International Political Economy, and diplomatic studies have sought to define and clarify its meaning and scope [1, 5].

Relevant definitions of economic diplomacy include Gilpin (1987) [6], who stated that economic diplomacy's core tenet is employing, interrupting, and directing commercial and political intercourse. Definitions of economic diplomacy within the foreign policy realm include Linda Yueh's analysis that "economic diplomacy should seek to balance commercial openness with strategic foreign policy aims, broadly defined." [7]. Equally, Baldwin [8] (1985), Qobo [9], and Chatterjee [10], refer to economic diplomacy as a policy tool or means of foreign policy to achieve certain goals, such as wealth, prosperity, power aggregation, and commercial and broader economic interests, with an actor or within the international system.

This article espouses two definitions of economic diplomacy: The first definition is by Maaïke Okano-Heijmans (2013), which offers a broad analysis of the concept, and states that economic diplomacy is the use of political tools as clout in international negotiations, to increase national economic prosperity, and the usage of economic leverage to support and improve the political stability of a nation [1]. The second definition by Berridge and James (2003) stated that "diplomacy employs economic resources, either as rewards or sanctions, in pursuit of a particular foreign policy objective. This underscores the consequences of economic diplomacy as having both positive and negative expressions, along with various instruments and means [11].

The functions and environments where economic diplomacy takes place are in national [10, 12], bilateral, regional, plurilateral and multilateral levels, interests and/or institutions [1, 5, 13]. Studies that focus on economic diplomacy within a state's foreign policy-making towards an issue or geographic area include economic diplomacy of Germany, Italy [14, 15], China [16], France [17], Australia [18], Mexico [19], Croatia [20] South Africa [9], Saudi Arabia [21], India, Indonesia [22], and Singapore [23]. Studies that scrutinised economic diplomacy cases from bilateral, regional, plurilateral and multilateral levels include the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation [24], Japan and the European Community [25], Atlantic conference [26], India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations + 3, [27] the European Union, [28] the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and India, [29] Indonesia, Peru and Chile [30] South Korea and Iraq [5], Nepal and Bangladesh [31], and the WTO and Brazil [32]. These show that the sheer number of studies on economic diplomacy demonstrates how it has been portrayed in different roles, whether by a state or an intergovernmental organisation, to advance certain interests in various contexts.

Relevant studies on Japan's post-war era include Berger et al. (2007) [33]. They observe how Japan's foreign policy shifted from a reactive/passive stance to a more coherent, strategic, and proactive approach, especially in security, economic relations, and regional diplomacy, influenced by pragmatic liberalism. Studies on Japan's economic diplomacy, such as Oyane (2003) [34] and Takase (2008) [35], examine Japan's post-war economic diplomacy, highlighting its successes and challenges and redefining Japan's international image in this context. Other papers include Japan's economic diplomacy towards Uzbekistan and the Arctic by Gao and Lin (2022) [36] and Tonami (2018) [37]. Furthermore, studies examining Japan-Iraq ties up to 2001

include Sakai (2001) [38]. Miyagi (2009) [39] scrutinises Japan's policy towards The 2003 Iraq war under Koizumani. Japan's political and economic ties with the Middle East have been examined by Nakamura and Wright (2023) [40], Allan and Sugihara (1993) [41], and Sharif (2010) [42]. Some papers study Iraq's economic diplomacy, such as Fadhal al-Faili (2024) [43], which examines the nexus between Iraq's economic diplomacy and national security. Abdul Jalil (2024) [44] analyses the future and role of economic diplomacy in Iraq's economy, highlighting how Iraq can leverage economic diplomacy instruments through both bilateral and multilateral approaches. While these studies highlight the importance of economic diplomacy for Iraq and Japan, no study examines their relations post-2003. This manuscript examines Iraq and Japan's bilateral economic diplomacy before and after 2003 and how it has shaped their relations.

The concept of economic diplomacy is contested and has various interpretations. However, Maaïke Okano-Heijmans' framework explains the concept in the context of Japan's economic diplomacy. Maaïke Okano-Heijmans analyses how Japan's economic diplomacy has broadened beyond East and South East Asia to encompass the Middle East and Africa, particularly emphasising energy security and alliance cohesion. Okano-Heijmans states that Japan's goals in economic diplomacy include hedging against economic dangers and instability through alliances with the US and via "different partners which have been cultivated, especially in Asia and the Middle East," and that the importance of natural resources in Japan's economic diplomacy is addressed through targeting oil and raw material rich countries in the Middle East, Latin America and Africa to secure the import of raw materials [1, 45]. Therefore, in essence, Okano-Heijmans' application explains Japan's economic diplomacy towards Middle Eastern countries, including Iraq [1, 45]. Okano-Heijmans' framework's three dimensions (context, tools, and processes) provide a comprehensive understanding of economic diplomacy in Iraqi-Japanese relations. First, context depicts domestic, regional and international dynamics and factors (political and economic) that shape the policy-makers' decision-making [1]. Joseph Nye, who coined the term soft power, underlines that soft power usually depends on the context in which the relationship exists [46]. Economic diplomacy's instruments are deployed, and interests are promoted in ways that fit the countries' interests in a specific regional or international context [1, 47]. Regional and global context, such as Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the UN sanctions on Iraq, determined how Japan's or Iraq's economic diplomacy instruments are chosen, such as Japan's negative tool (embargo) on Iraq.

Second, in this framework, the tools are economic diplomacy instruments that governments use to achieve specific goals and intended effects. Maaïke Okano-Heijmans [1, 2, 48] lists the following instruments and Moons and van Bergeijk (2018) [13] categorise them into positive and negative instruments. Positive instruments include development assistance and cooperation, aid, trade agreements, promoting trade and investments and upgrading diplomatic representations and state visits. Negative instruments include specific financial and trade sanctions, boycotts, embargoes, withdrawal of ambassadors and diplomatic representations, and closing of embassies and consulates [5, 13, 48].

Third, the process dimension involves analysing negotiations and communication strategies across various settings, including summits, regional diplomacy, and bilat-

eral and multilateral forums and institutions. The processes explore how negotiations or communication approaches are carried out across different modes [1]. This dimension exposes the motivations and interests of the actors involved in these negotiations [2].

The crux of the three dimensions of economic diplomacy developed by Okano-Heijmans has been utilised in various academic works, such as van Bergeijk and Moons (2018) [4] who explore how these dimensions assist in researching economic diplomacy. All dimensions are interrelated and shape each other. The context moulds the decisions of key actors regarding how to pursue their interests and guides the choices of influential elites regarding the instruments they use. These dimensions are complementary, as the inquiries into when (context), what (tools or instruments), and how (process) contribute to understanding why economic diplomacy exists as a strategic approach for a country to pursue its national interests, including economic prosperity [1]. The leading analytical view of economic diplomacy is foreign policy, which involves reaching a decision through negotiations, processes, and the deployment of political and economic tools. Policymakers choose suitable tools to seek (perceived) national interests, considering the country's position in the world. As a result, the context plays a crucial role in shaping the judgments of key decision-makers regarding how to promote their interests effectively [1]. The dimensions fit with Japan's and Iraq's relations, as their bilateral ties have been shaped by regional and global contexts. Influenced by the latter, official relations emerged and repeatedly severed and re-emerged from World War II (WWII) to the post-2003 era. These contexts dictated why, when and how processes occur, and instruments are deployed between Tokyo and Baghdad.

Economic diplomacy is featured in the platforms and documents of Japan's governmental bodies, including (MOFA Japan) and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). MOFA Japan includes a dedicated section on economic diplomacy on its official website, which falls under the broader category of foreign policy. Additionally, MOFA Japan publishes the Diplomatic Bluebook, an annual report that addresses specific issues concerning Japan's economic diplomacy and objectives within its foreign policy initiatives. This Bluebook lists the international trade agreements that form part of Japan's economic diplomacy activities [49]. The Diplomatic BlueBook 2023, on economic diplomacy, falls within the concept's dimensions and it indicates to: geopolitical positions and competitions between countries relevant to Japan, which are "contexts"; instruments such as promoting trade and Foreign Direct Investments; and processes (Japan's negotiations at international conferences and with partners) [50].

Iraq's Prime Minister (PM) Haider Abadi in 2018, Iraq's Foreign Affairs Minister, Faud Hussein in 2022, and Iraq's Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shorsh Saeed, in 2025, underlined the importance of economic diplomacy and its tools for Iraq's foreign affairs to achieve national interests [5, 51]. However, some observers, such as Hassan (2020) [52], believe that Iraq's economic diplomacy lacked a strategy during al-Kadhimi's cabinet (2020–2022) [53]. While this argument could apply to other Iraqi cabinets, Iraq does not have a roadmap for pursuing economic diplomacy; however, it has promoted some positive economic diplomacy instruments. For example, in 2012, Japan and Iraq signed a bilateral investment

agreement. Economic diplomacy's tools, positive and negative, are deployed by both countries in different contexts. For example, negative tools have been employed by Japan as it imposed economic sanctions on Iraq and adhered to the UNSC Resolution 661 (1990) following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. The following sections will examine how the dimensions mould the stages.

Methodology

To address the research question, the article utilises primary resources, including trade data from the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) and Japan's Trade Statistics from the Ministry of Finance (SJ-MoF). The data on trade between Iraq and Japan was obtained from the OEC database, which provides detailed global trade information. This data was filtered using the website's historical data feature to select year-by-year trade statistics. Another source of data was the Trade Statistics of Japan published by Japan's Ministry of Finance. This resource offers comprehensive information on Japan's international trade, including detailed statistics on exports and imports. The trade data from this database has been filtered on an annual basis and by country to provide specific details on Japan's trade with Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries. Data visualisations were created in Excel. Furthermore, official documents from both Iraq's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA Japan), as well as from the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), provide relevant insights into policy issues and statements on Iraq-Japan bilateral relations. Additionally, the article utilises secondary sources, including local and international news outlets, relevant firms, and governmental reports such as Japan Petroleum Exploration [54] and METI's White Paper published in 2009.

Stage One: The Origin of the Bilateral Ties

Pre-war Japan's foreign policy fundamentally differed from post-war Japan's due to the changes in Japan's political system. However, the bilateral relations from that period have been examined to understand their roots. During this time, Japan's approach in the Middle East was primarily focused on trade and reflected its imperial ambitions, which involved monitoring the British-Russian rivalry, including in Iran, as part of the broader competition among great powers [55]. In the early relationship between Iraq and Japan, before WWII, there was no emergence of economic diplomacy. This absence is partly attributed to the dimension of "context." The context is evident in Japan's limited engagements with Iraq, particularly during the 1920s, when Iraq was under British mandate, and after 1932, under British influence. In the 1920s, Japan's relations with the Middle East under colonial powers were trade-driven, limited in scope, and transactional. This included Japan exporting textiles to Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iran, eventually becoming the world's largest textile exporter by 1933 [38, 56]. The Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq (1932–1958) gained its sovereignty from Great Britain in 1932 – the British maintained their influence and had advisors throughout most parts of the Iraqi government until 1958 – and

depended on Japanese textiles; Iraq was the second largest importer in the Middle East. In 1934, Yamashita Kisen (now Mitsui) started a shipping route to Iraq, the same year Iraq began importing cement from Japan [57]. At the beginning of the 1930s, Iraq and Japan had no bilateral diplomatic missions, and Iraqi and Japanese officials met for commercial talks. Japan's interest in Iraqi products was minimal, with Japanese firms showing little appetite for goods like dates and wheat, despite Iraq's efforts to promote them. Both sides relied on the British government and its consular services to facilitate communication and convey their respective interests [58].

By the second half of the 1930s, Japan aimed to establish a Consulate-General. In June 1939, prompted by its growing trade interests in Iraq, Japan set up a Japan Trade Agency and Legation in Baghdad, a low form of diplomatic representation (lower than an embassy) typically led by a minister [56]. In the 1930s, Mitsubishi Trading Company (MTC) set up an office in Baghdad, which promoted trade and facilitated the importation of Japanese goods and the exportation of some local Iraqi commodities, such as wheat and raw cotton [41, 59]. Japan increased its trade with Iraq after Iraq imposed its import-export ratio system on Japan in 1938, which rose from 15% to 35% of export value [41]. Japan attempted to have close political ties with anti-British Iraqi PM Rashid al-Gailani. However, these attempts were thwarted when al-Gailani was overthrown by the British forces in 1941. This was when London and Tokyo were on opposing sides in WWII, the Allied powers versus the Axis powers. Subsequently, Iraq severed relations with Japan, and Japanese trading companies were forced to close their offices in Baghdad. Therefore, the occurrence of fractional formal ties was short-lived [38, 41].

Stage Two: Iraq and Japan in the Post-War Era

Post-WWII, a new-fangled global context marked the onset of economic diplomacy between the two countries, as bilateral relations were re-established and Tokyo aimed to forge new connections with the Middle East. Japan's energy needs grew post-WWII, and thus Iraqi-Japanese bilateral ties revitalised, with economic diplomacy becoming paramount. This period echoes the initial use of the concept's processes (communication between Japanese and Iraqi officials) and positive instruments between both countries (e.g. establishing diplomatic representations). In 1953, Japan sent a delegation to Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Egypt and Syria, and the officials were headed by the acting Japanese minister Sasamoto [38]. This diplomatic mission aimed to have political and trade ties with the region, including Iraq [56, 60]. In 1955, Iraq ratified the San Francisco Peace Treaty to restore diplomatic relations between the two countries [61]. Iraq opened its legation in Tokyo in 1955, and Japan's legation was restored in 1956. In 1957, Japan invited Iraq's Crown Prince Abdul Ilah of Hejaz, who visited Tokyo [62]. After the Iraqi monarchy was toppled by an Iraqi military coup in 1958, which led to the establishment of the Republic of Iraq, Japan planned to invite Iraqi PM Abdul Karim Qasim (1958–1963). In 1960, both Japan and Iraq upgraded their legations to embassies [57]. The elevation of diplomatic representations marks the deployment of positive instruments between Japan and Iraq.

Japan's move from coal to oil powered its post-war economic development in the 1950s and 1960s, which increasingly depended on Middle Eastern energy [63]. This period coincided with the increase in oil output in the region, including Iraq (Rumaila giant oil field) [64]. Japan's reliance on oil from the Middle East rose from 7 per cent in the early 1950s to 80.1 per cent by 1960 to 84.7 per cent by 1970. Japan's growing need for oil, essential for its industrial complexes, has shaped its energy trade and foreign trade relations since the mid-1950s, necessitating the mastery of its economic diplomacy [65].

Japan's first imported oil from Iran was in 1921, and in 1957, Japan's Arabian Oil Company was founded. It was the first Japanese company to produce oil in the Gulf [66]. Oil trade began between Iraq and Japan at the beginning of the 1960s, and the volume of trade was inconsistent. For example, in 1968, Japan imported approximately 50,000 barrels of oil from Iraq. However, in 1972, that number dropped significantly to only 5,000 barrels, which accounted for less than 1 per cent of Japan's oil imports from the region. In contrast, that year, other Middle Eastern countries supplied a much larger share, with Iran providing 37 per cent (1,585,000 barrels) and Saudi Arabia supplying 710,000 barrels of Japan's oil imports [67, 68]. Iraq's imports of goods from Japan increased from the late 1950s and 1960s, as in 1957 Iraq imported \$24.92 million and \$30.24 million in 1969. Thus, over one decade, Japan's share increased from 7.9 to 8.3 per cent [69]. The two key bilateral agreements that illustrate the use of economic diplomacy's positive instruments by both countries to ease trade are the Trade Agreement of 1964 and the Mutual Legal Assistance Agreement of 1968 [70].

Stage Three: The 1973 Oil Crisis and the 1980s: Economic Shocks and Rewards

In these decades, the global context, namely the 1973 oil crisis in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war (the fourth war between an Arab coalition led by Egypt against Israel) and the second oil crisis (1979–1980), led to the effective use of economic diplomacy tools and processes (negotiations). The mutual interest between Iraq and Japan extended enormously from the 1970s through the 1980s, and some scholars, such as Sakai (2001), call this period the honeymoon due to the flourishing economic and trade bilateral relations [71]. The 1973 oil crisis jeopardised progress, but Japan's proactive, successful engagement with the Middle East can be understood through the "process" dimension (negotiations via productive summits and meetings) and positive instruments, which helped Japan avoid the oil embargo. The 1973 oil crisis was a pivotal moment in Japan's Middle East policy. It shifted the region from being a passive, distant, marginal concern to a central focus of Japan's foreign policy and economic diplomacy. Before 1973, Japan's involvement in the Middle East was limited, mainly trade and commercial, and characterised by low political engagement and minimal strategic interest. Japan primarily viewed the region through an economic lens, seeking stable oil supplies without becoming involved in the region [72].

By 1973, Japan imported around 99 per cent of crude oil, and around 43 per cent was from the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), which includes Iraq [73]. In October 1973, OAPEC classified Japan as "unfriendly," exposing its economic vulnerabilities, and this could be seen as a negative instrument by

OAPEC. The consequences included inflation, recession, and a trade deficit for Japan [64]. According to Japanese PM Takeo Miki (1974–1976), the implications of the 1973 oil crisis stemming from the Arab-Israeli war contributed to Japan's independent foreign policy, distancing it from the US during this crisis [74]. In 1973, Takeo Miki visited eight countries in the region, including Iraq, and met Iraqi President Ahmed Al-Baker to secure oil flow and address their demands, which indicates to the process dimension. Japan repeatedly had to state its support for the Arab position to lift the oil embargo. Japan proactively employed positive instruments and offered economic and technical aid, including to Iraq. Ultimately, on December 15, 1973, Japan's status changed to "friendly," the oil embargo was lifted, and Iraqi Industry and Minerals Minister Sa'adun Hammadi praised Japan's proactive attitude [75].

Shortly after the oil crisis, more processes occurred at summits and positive instruments were utilised by both countries, such as joint committees, trade agreements and further aid from Japan. In January 1974, Japan's Minister of International Trade and Industry (MITI), Yasuhiro Nakasone, visited Iraq. In turn, Iraq's Economy Minister, Hikmat Al-Azzawi, visited Tokyo and included a discussion of Japan's construction of projects and oil imports from Iraq. These exchanges resulted in the signing of the Economic and Technological Cooperation Agreement (ETCA) in August 1974 [67]. ETCA laid the groundwork for the Japan-Iraq Joint Committee Meetings, which began in 1975 and continued until the end of the 1980s. Japan offered Iraq (US\$250 million loan) and US\$750 million export credits to help Iraq's construction of fertilisers as part of the agreement [67, 76]. Japan collaborated on the construction of six projects, while Iraq agreed to supply 90 million tons of petroleum and liquefied petroleum gas to Japan over 10 years [64, 77]. Projects funded by Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) included the Khor al-Zubair Chemical and Fertiliser Plant in Hartha in 1975 and a thermal power plant in 1976 [67]. In 1977, the first Japan-Iraq joint committee met in Tokyo, and Japan agreed to provide an additional loan of US\$1 billion to Iraq, following Iraq's request for the loan made during MITI Minister Toshio Koumoto's visit to Iraq in 1976 [77]. Despite Japan's increased diplomatic engagement in the Middle East—such as visits and economic agreements—and its strengthening of diplomatic ties with Arab states to reduce future risks, its ability to act independently of the US was somewhat constrained. Japan's policy generally had to balance the demands of Arab oil states and US strategic expectations. Its approach towards the region was influenced by its reliance on the US for security and military guarantees, and it refrained from actions that might antagonise US strategic interests [64, 78]. Nonetheless, Japan's public statements in support of the Arab stance prompted disappointment and understanding from the US State Department. For example, spokesman George Vest said, "While the United States appreciated the difficulties Japan faced because of a threatened oil embargo from the Middle East, we regret that the Japanese Government found it necessary to make a statement of this nature." [79]. While Japan's public statements regarding the crisis were designed to reassure Arab oil countries and maintain favourable relations for energy security, they were carefully calibrated to protect its economic interests [75].

Japan experienced its second oil crisis from 1979 to 1980, driven by regional context dimension, particularly the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the Iran-Iraq War. These events disrupted the oil supply and prompted the Organisation of the Petro-

leum Exporting Countries to increase oil prices by around 40 per cent. This phase illustrates the process dimension as Japan communicated with energy-producing countries, including Iraq, and used positive tools, such as technological cooperation and aid, to secure a stable energy flow [71, 80, 81]. In 1979, the Iraq-Japan joint committee was held again when MITI Minister Masumi Esaki visited Iraq, and further discussions were held on technological cooperation and facilitating Iraq's oil flow to Japan on a government-to-government basis rather than via multinational oil companies [77]. In return, Masumi Esaki pledged more than \$2 billion in loans to support Iraq's industrial development. Trade flourished, and in 1979, Iraq placed an order for 61,000 cars from Japan, making it Japan's second-largest automobile export destination after the US [82]. The first and second oil crises paved the way for closer relations between Baghdad and Tokyo, and Iraq became a top market for Japanese construction companies in this period [67].

The Iran-Iraq War commenced in 1980, marking a regional context dimension that shaped Iraq-Japan relations. The 1980s included discussions on how to proceed with bilateral ties, which illustrate the process dimension. The Japanese government-initiated efforts for a ceasefire, maintaining cordial relations with both Iran and Iraq throughout the conflict. In 1983, Japanese foreign minister Shintaro Abe visited Iran and Iraq to discuss trade and a potential peace deal [83]. Iraq continued to be a crucial market for Japanese investments, and it sustained its engagement and grew bilateral trade. Between 1979 and 1981, total trade was US\$3 billion each year, and Baghdad accounted for around one-fifth of Japan's overseas plant orders. The 1970s and the early 1980s witnessed the use of economic diplomacy tools, such as Japan's aid to and investments in Iraq. In 1982, the OAD built 14 general hospitals, and in 1985, Japan developed the Baijii Fertiliser Plant [67]. However, the continuation of the Iraq-Iran War raised the risk for Japanese investors to increase their investment in Iraq. For example, the Iraqi Army attacked a petrochemical plant in Iran at the beginning of the 1980s, which was under construction by Japan at that time, leading the Japanese consortium to withdraw from the plant and pay compensation. An example that reveals shrinking ties is the reduction of Japanese presence in Iraq from 5,000 in the 1970s to 1,000 in the 1980s due to the war [82]. Iraq-Japan trade declined at the end of the 1980s, whereas Japan's trade with other Middle Eastern countries, such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait, rose (see Table 1 and chart 1). For instance, in 1987, Iraq-Japan total trade dropped by 48.5% to a million [84]. The Fifth Japan-Iraq Joint Meeting, held in November 1987 in Baghdad, was to discuss how to improve trade relations [84, 85]. However, due to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the following decade marks the lowest point in bilateral relations since WWII.

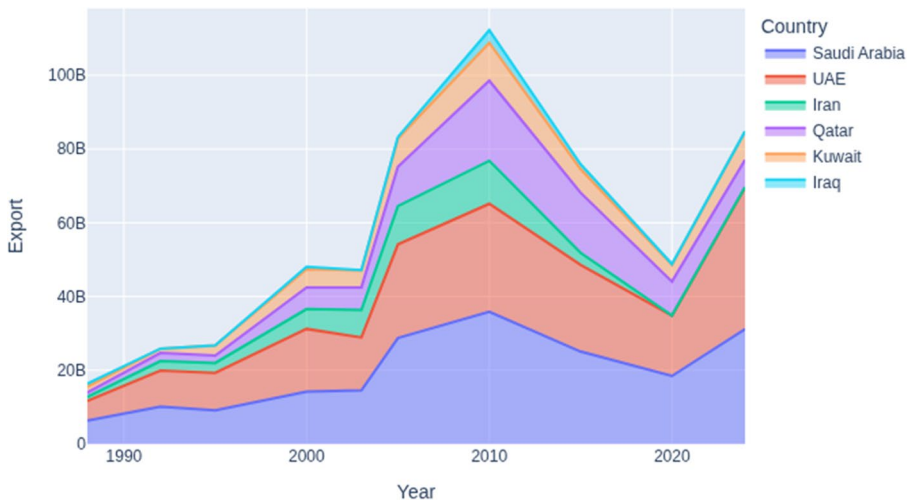
Stage Four: The first Gulf War and Economic Sanctions on Iraq in the 1990s

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the subsequent US-led coalition for its liberation shaped the "context" that severely strained relations between Japan and Iraq for more than a decade, lasting until 2003. This context demonstrates the limitations of positive instruments, but it allows for the application of negative instruments, such as embargoes [86] as Japan and Iraq used negative instruments. On August 6, 1990, Japan announced comprehensive economic sanctions against Iraq, including a trade

Table 1 Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran, Qatar, Kuwait and Iraq's exports to Japan (2018–2024). Created and calculated by the author, and sources include the OEC and SJ-MoF

Year	Saudi Arabia's exports to Japan	The UAE's exports to Japan	Iran's exports to Japan	Qatar's exports to Japan	Kuwait's exports to Japan	Iraq's exports to Japan
1988	6.34b	5.31b	1.16b	1.13b	1.58b	827 m
1992	10.18b	9.73b	2.60b	2.17b	1.19b	1.2 m
1995	9.13b	10.19b	2.65b	2.04b	2.77b	1 m
2000	14.2b	17.02b	5.36b	5.86b	4.99b	661 m
2003	14.56b	14.34b	7.43b	6.15b	4.56b	103 m
2005	28.76b	25.36b	10.38b	10.68b	7.64b	438 m
2010	35.87b	29.26b	11.68b	21.69b	10.26b	3.42b
2015	25.07b	23.51b	3.25b	16.3b	6.41b	1.3b
2020	18.44b	16.39b	33.8 m	9.18b	4.56b	181 m
2024	31.14b	38.46b	20.19 m	7.42b	7.7b	17 m

Abbreviations: *b* billion, *m* million

**Chart 1** Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran, Qatar, Kuwait and Iraq's exports to Japan (2018–2024). Created and calculated by the author, and sources include the OEC and SJ-MoF

embargo and the suspension of investment, loans, and cooperation activities, prior to the UN Security Council sanctions on Iraq on the 6th of August 1990. Japan's swift reaction to Iraq's invasion was not unnatural, as Japan had a firm stance against military aggression. For instance, Japan's prompt opposition to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1979 [87]. Iraq did not anticipate such firm responses from Japan, as it continued to grant Japanese firms preferential treatment. In response, Iraq ceased issuing visas to Japanese citizens and prohibited them from leaving the country [73]. Early in the conflict, the Iraqi regime took 213 Japanese citizens hostage among a total of 2,000 foreigners, using them as human shields against foreign attacks [88]. Japanese PM Toshiki Kaifu approached Iraq and other Middle Eastern states to plead

for their support to release the hostages, and Toshiki Kaifu met with Iraqi Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan in Amman in October 1990 [89]. The UN, the Red Cross, Japan and its Western allies successfully negotiated with Iraq to release the hostages [90, 91].

Toshiki planned to post troops from the Japanese Self-Defence Forces to join the multinational forces against Iraq, but the Japanese Court and Diet (the national legislature of Japan) blocked the PM's decision. Japan provided financial aid of \$13 billion to the multinational forces [92]. In January 1991, Iraq considered Japan a "hostile nation", and Iraq's ambassador to Japan, Rashid Rifai, said, "Japan will be responsible for every drop of blood, every destruction that is caused in Iraq" [93]. In 1991, Japan temporarily ceased the function of its embassy in Baghdad after Japanese diplomats evacuated Baghdad, and later, its function was minimal. In the same year, Iraq lowered its diplomatic mission at the Iraqi Embassy in Tokyo, from an ambassador to the Charge Affairs [94].

While politically and financially, Japan supported the US-led coalition, the US was dissatisfied with Japan's role as a "diplomacy check." After the Gulf War, Japan was excluded from the celebrations of victory by the US and its allies, and it was not included in the New York Times's message of gratitude for the liberation of Kuwait [95]. Japan experienced a period known as "Iraqi or Japan shock" due to its ill-preparedness for the demands of a new international system led by the US. After the Cold War, Japan realised it should play a major role in international affairs [95].

During the UN sanctions against Iraq under Resolution 661, announced in August 1990, Japan exported humanitarian supplies to Iraq, such as medicine and foodstuffs, which were allowed [96, 97]. Due to Iraq's regime crackdown on the Iraqi revolt in the south and the KR-I in the 1990s, which created mass refugees in Iran and Turkey, Japan sent the Japan Disaster Relief Teams to Iran and Turkey [41, 98]. Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Japanese investors became more hesitant to invest in Iraq, and trade declined unprecedentedly. For instance, while total trade in 1989 was US\$1.23 billion, in 1991, it dropped to US\$508 thousand and US\$1 million in 1994, with Iraq exports comprising none. However, Japanese companies have traded with Iraq since 1996 through UN humanitarian assistance to Iraq via the "oil for food program," which was in place from 1996 to 2003. Through this programme, in 1997, Japanese companies imported crude oil from Iraq worth US\$1.1 million [99]. In 1997, Japan provided US\$1.46 million in emergency aid to Iraq to ease its negotiations for oil deals.

Bilateral ties further deteriorated as Japan expressed its diplomatic support to the US Operation Northern Watch in 1997, and it enforced a no-fly zone in Iraqi Kurdistan to protect the region from Saddam's airstrikes. Additionally, Japan diplomatically supported Operation Desert Fox in 1998, as Iraq did not allow UN inspectors to visit specific military sites. In response, Iraq announced it would not allow Japan to purchase oil from Iraq through the UN programme [73]. Despite this, Japan continued purchasing oil from Iraq through the UN programme. Please see Table 2, charts 2 and 3, which show the substantial drop in bilateral trade in the 1990s, the gradual increase in trade through the UN humanitarian programme, and the continuation of trade through the UN despite Iraq's disgruntlement with Japan's support to the US-led coalition. Since the mid-1970s, Japan has begun diversifying its oil supplies,

Table 2 Japan-Iraq bilateral trade (1988–2024): Japan export to Iraq & Iraq export to Japan. Created and calculated by the author and sources include the OEC and SJ-MoF

Year	Japan to Iraq	Iraq to Japan	Total Trade
2024	899 M	17 M	916 M
2023	847 M	29 M	876 M
2022	660 M	312 K	660 M
2021	420 M	230 M	650 M
2020	366 M	181 M	547 M
2019	750 M	947 M	1.7 B
2018	360 M	1.3 B	1.66 B
2017	284 M	1 B	1.28 B
2016	345 M	1.08 B	1.43 B
2015	506 M	1.3 B	1.81 B
2014	579 M	1.54 B	2.12 B
2013	735 M	2.5 B	3.24 B
2012	358 M	2.8 B	3.16 B
2011	338 M	3.73 B	4.07 B
2010	307 M	3.42 B	3.73 B
2009	318 M	1.41 B	1.73 B
2008	203 M	1.52 B	1.72 B
2007	119 M	1.02 B	1.14 B
2006	199 M	911 M	1.11 B
2005	131 M	438 M	569 M
2004	70.2 M	1.17 B	1.24 B
2003	75 M	103 M	178 M
2002	283 M	110 M	393 M
2001	191 M	136 K	191 M
2000	43 M	661 M	704 M
1999	33.6 M	689 M	723 M
1998	9.5 M	83 M	92.5 M
1997	4.96 M	117 M	122 M
1996	323 K	4 K	327 K
1995	303 K	1 M	1.3 M
1994	1.1 M	0	1.1 M
1993	474 K	0	474 K
1992	415 M	1.2 M	416 M
1991	301 K	207 K	508 K
1990	262 M	943 M	1.21 B
1989	490 M	1.2 B	1.69 B
1988	405 M	827 M	1.23 B

Abbreviations: *k* thousand, *b* billion, *m* million

which has reduced its reliance on one or two countries, [87, 100] and provided Japan with more leeway to decouple its economy and, consequently, its policies from an area of instability.

Stage Five: Japan and Iraq: Reviving Relations Post-2003

Japan's first post-WWII military deployment to war and its willingness to participate in international security came after 9/11, when it dispatched its warships to the Indian Ocean in support of the US-led coalition in Afghanistan. Subsequently, in February

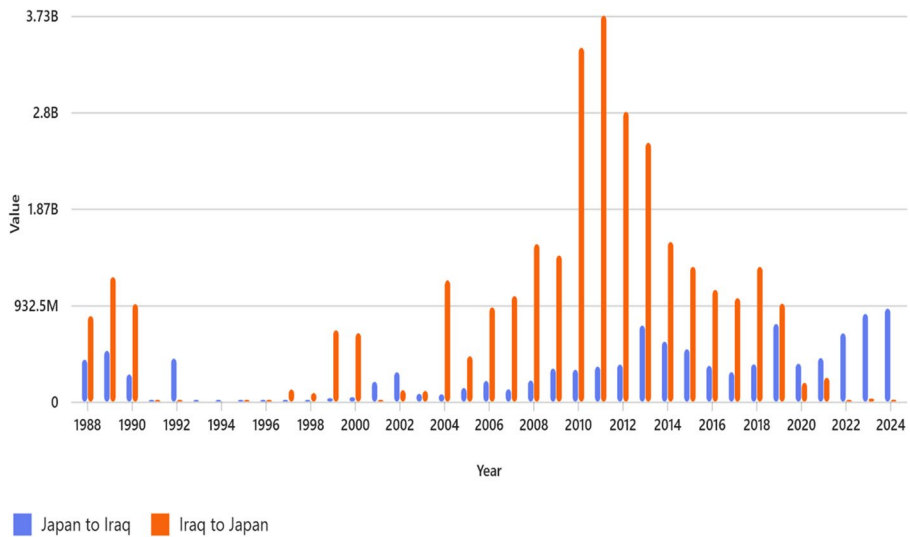


Chart 2 Japan-Iraq bilateral trade (1988–2024): Japan export to Iraq & Iraq export to Japan. Created and calculated by the author, and sources include the OEC and SJ-MoF

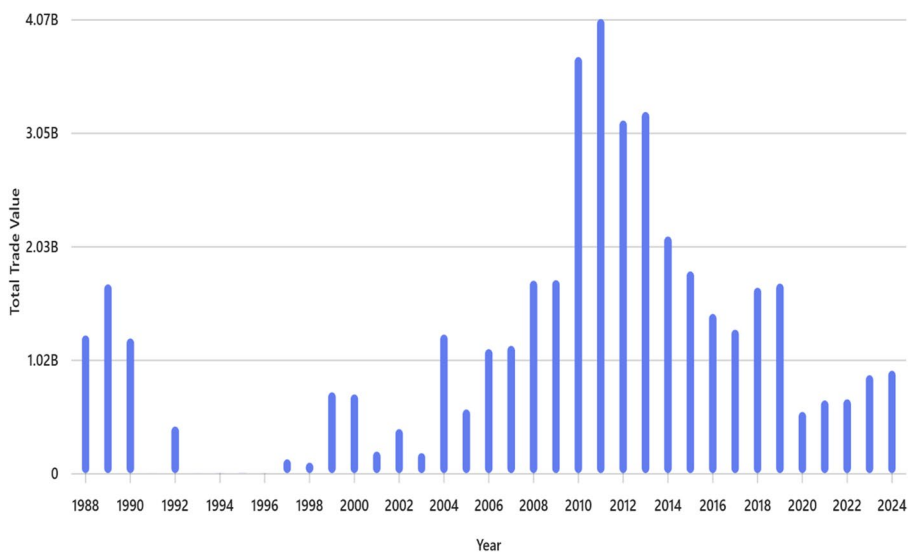


Chart 3 Total trade between Japan and Iraq (1988–2024). Created and calculated by the author, and sources include the OEC and SJ-MoF:

2002, Japan's PM Junichiro Koizumi vowed assistance to US President George W Bush's war on terror. This commitment set a precedent for Japan's involvement in the Iraq War, and PM Koizumi promised "unconditional" support for the Iraq War [101]. In early 2003, Japan was under pressure to follow through on its promises, a point underscored by US Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, who high-

lighted the importance of boots on the ground and sent several messages to Tokyo. In May 2003, President Bush asked PM Junichiro Koizumi that the US expects “boots on the ground” from its ally [Japan], and Koizumi offered Bush his “heart to heart” (*ishin denshin*) promise to dispatch Japanese troops for humanitarian and reconstruction in Iraq [102–104]. PM Koizumi Junichiro utilised the US-led “war on terror” and the Iraq War as opportunities to strengthen relations with Washington and expand Japan’s international military role, pushing beyond Japan’s pacifist constitution (Article 9). Japanese leaders argued that their alliance obligations left them with “no choice” but to back US actions. However, this justification usually aligned with domestic political goals, particularly the efforts to normalise Japan’s military posture and enhance its status on the global stage [104, 105]. The US-Japan relations were shaped by Japanese dependency. Additionally, there was also a persistent tension between conservative assertiveness (supporters of the war) and popular pacifism (opponents of the war). The former included a realist-minded group surrounding PM Koizumi, advocating for Japan becoming a great power. Popular pacifism comprised ordinary Japanese citizens (according to a Japanese poll, 60 per cent disapproved of Japan’s involvement in the Iraq War), four Japanese opposition parties, and a small segment of the media. Consequently, there was a heated debate in Japan between the opponents and supporters [39, 104, 106, 107].

In September 2002, PM Koizumi spoke at the UN General Assembly and stated that Iraq “must comply with all the relevant UN Security Council resolutions” and “must allow immediate and unconditional inspections and dispose of all weapons of mass destruction” [108]. In March 2003, Koizumi declared that he supported an attack against Iraq with the US-led “coalition of the willing” and without a UN resolution after Bush’s ultimatum. Koizumi justified this position by arguing that Japan needed to contribute to international security and maintain a robust alliance with the US during North Korea’s threats [109]. Japan swiftly enacted legalisation authorising the dispatch of Ground Self-Defence Forces (GSDF) to support humanitarian assistance and post-war reconstruction. The GSDF would operate only in ‘non-combat’ areas [110]. Japan underscored non-combat areas to avoid violating its pacifist constitution, which “renounces war and the use of force to settle international disputes.” [111].

Iraq-Japan relations have been shaped by the context dimension “local and global,” which includes Japan’s avoiding Iraq shock, the US-Japan alliance’s imperative, and Japan’s role in the US-led coalition in the Iraq War. A new context emerged after topping Saddam, which revived bilateral ties and demonstrated the presence of processes and positive instruments, including re-establishing ties after 2003, numerous summits, sizable aid and investments. At the Madrid International Donor conference for Iraq’s reconstruction in November 2003, Japan was the second highest donor after the US (US\$20 bn) and offered US\$5 bn (1.5b grant and 3.5b loan) [112]. Japan relieved Iraq of 80% of its debt, totalling \$6.8 billion by 2008, based on the agreement reached between Tokyo and Baghdad at the Paris Club Agreement in November 2004. [113] Since 2003, Japan has been proactively and diplomatically engaged in Iraq and has vowed to reopen its embassy in Baghdad. In May 2003, Japanese Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Toshimitsu Motegi went to Baghdad to assess the risk and situation and directly met with US and UN officials [114]. In 2003 and 2004,

members of Iraq's Governing Council (2003–June 2004), operating under the supervision of the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority, visited Japan. For instance, in March 2004, an Iraqi delegation led by Mohammed Bahr Al Uloom, the Chairman of Iraq's Governing Council, travelled to Japan and met PM Koizumi and other members of the Japanese cabinet [115]. In 2004, PM Koizumi and Iraqi interim PM Ayad Allawi underlined the importance of Japan's contribution to Iraq's reconstruction and stability. These official and diplomatic visits and discussions represent a positive economic diplomacy instrument centred on Iraq's reconstruction, Japan's assistance, and Iraq's transitional process [116].

As Iraq's insurgency was on the rise post-2003, the security risk increased for the Japanese presence. Two Japanese diplomats, including Japan's ambassador to Iraq, Katsuhiko Oku, appointed in 2003, who headed to an event in Tikrit on Iraq's reconstruction, were murdered on the 29th of November 2003 by terrorists. Furthermore, a Japanese civilian traveller was kidnapped in Iraq and later executed by al-Qaeda in Iraq led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in October 2004. Al-Zarqawi demanded Japan's withdrawal from Iraq, but Japan refused [117]. These incidents sent shock waves across Japan at a time when Japan's involvement was controversial, and public opinion in Japan was deeply divided on the Iraq War, and there were anti-war protests [118]. Japan was eager to maintain cordinal relations with Iraq and appointed Kenjiro Monji as Japan's ambassador to Iraq, and Iraq's first ambassador post-2003 to Japan was Ghanim Alwan Aljumaily, who was appointed from 2004 until 2009.

Japan's Experience in Samawah

After the US official request, in January 2004, Japan dispatched 600 GSDF to Iraq, known as the Japanese Iraq Reconstruction and Support Group (JIRSG) or in Japanese Jietai Iraku Fukkou Shiengun. They were based in Iraq's southern city of Samawah, the capital of Muthana governorate. This is the first Japanese ground military deployment since 1945 into an active war region [119]. The reasons why Samawah was chosen for Japanese troops to be stationed include: First, Japanese officials and Japan's National Defence Agency (Bōeichō) assessed Samawah as "safe enough" for Japanese troops to carry out humanitarian operations, and even PM Junichiro Koizumi underscored the security assessment [120]. Secondly, in al-Muthana, there was a need for reconstruction efforts with significant deterioration of infrastructure, neglected medical facilities, high unemployment of around 70% and Japan's government fact-finding mission found that these issues should be addressed [121, 122]. The JIRSG's central mission was humanitarian and reconstruction, which included medical support and water supply. The mission helped rebuild infrastructure at 133 locations in Samawah (including medical facilities, schools, roads, and protected archaeological sites), delivered equipment and trucks to local authorities, and employed thousands of Iraqis working on these projects [123]. Third, the Japanese government under Koizumi needed to manage public opinion and constitutional constraints, and by choosing a location viewed as somewhat safe enough, they aimed to minimise potential domestic criticism. This was necessary as Japan's Act on Special Measures concerning Humanitarian Relief and Reconstruction Work and Security

Assistance in Iraq (Act No. 137 of 2003) serves as a legal framework established by Japan's Diet (the bicameral national legislature of Japan). This permits the Japanese GSDF to be deployed to Iraq for purposes of reconstruction and humanitarian assistance [124, 125]. Koizumi stated that, according to the law, the Japanese troops "will not engage in the use of force" and "will not participate in combative activities" [126]. Fourth, collaboration between Japan's GSDF and MOFA Japan allows Japanese firms to secure reconstruction contracts and facilitate more targeted ODA grants in the necessary areas of Samawah [127]. Fifth, the simultaneous presence of Dutch and British forces provided a security umbrella for Japanese troops [128].

The first commander of JIRSG was LTG Bansho, who called for supporting the role of locals and urged an approach known as "Silk Hat Diplomacy", which means maintaining a high Bushido spirit (principles that include benevolence and respect), thus helping Iraqis with empathy [129]. The JIRSGS wore Insignia/badges on their military uniforms stating in Arabic *E'adat al-E'mmar*, which means reconstruction, to demonstrate their non-combatant role. They engaged with locals and organised festivities [130]. An Iraqi-Japanese Friends Association conducted a small poll (about 130 people) in December 2004 to assess how locals in Samawah view the Japanese authorities. The vast majority had positive views and voted for Japan to stay [131]. While hundreds of locals marched and thanked JIRSG in May 2004 in Samawah, [132] in July 2005, there were anti-Japan demonstrations driven by then anti-US Islamic Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr, partly due to the lack of water and electricity [133].

In November 2004, Iraqi Deputy PM Barham Salih visited Samawah and met with Japanese forces to discuss reconstruction efforts. Salih said, "Samawah is a shining example of the cooperation between the local population and the Iraqi Interim government as well as the multi-national forces [Japan]." [134]. In 2003, 2004, and 2005, Japanese officials visited Baghdad and Samawah, such as Nukaga Fukushima, Japan's Minister of Defense, who visited Samawah in 2005 to oversee Japan's troops and visit a new school built by Japan [135]. Despite this optimism, Michael Penn (2007) observed that JIRSG were not as effective as portrayed. They were hiding in their compounds largely to avoid casualties that might cause Japanese public uproar [136]. Even with threats to JIRSG, there were no casualties among them, and Iraqi and Japanese officials commended Japan's role in Iraq and its contribution to bilateral relations.

The Continuation of Japan-Iraq Economic Diplomacy: From Aid and Reconstruction to Trade

The new era of Japan-Iraq relations constitutes positive instruments, including state visits, trade missions, establishing new consulates, investment promotion, signing trade agreements, capacity building initiatives, reconstruction, and development cooperation, which includes aid [13, 137]. In October 2004, Japan hosted the Iraq Reconstruction conference in Tokyo, where 53 countries and international organisations participated, including the Iraqi interim government and Deputy PM Barham Salih, attended. At this conference, Japan underscored its aid contribution in Madrid

in 2003, the outcomes of Japanese grants, the ODA's and JIRSG's humanitarian reconstruction activities that support Iraqi reconstruction [138]. Japan was the largest partner of the UN-HABITAT Iraq reconstruction programme and donated over \$42 million to reconstruction projects in 2004 across Baghdad, Bagqubah, Kirkuk, Samawah, Nassiriya, and Basra [139].

In November 2005, Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari visited Japan and met with the PM and his counterpart to discuss Iraq's reconstruction. They emphasised Japan's commitment to cancelling 80% of Iraq's debt. Zebari thanked Japan's forces and hoped their mission in Samawah would be extended. The following month, Iraqi interim PM Ibrahim al-Jafaari visited Japan, requesting an extension of the Japanese mission and discussing loans for oil infrastructure. Subsequently, in December 2005, Japan's cabinet approved the extension for one year. In June 2006, PM Koizumi stated that Japan would withdraw its troops from Iraq: "We have decided to withdraw our troops from Iraq after judging that our troops' humanitarian and reconstruction assistance has attained a certain level of achievement" [140].

During Iraqi Oil Minister Hussain al-Shahristani's 2006 visit to Japan, more positive tools, such as capacity-building initiatives, were employed as Japan pledged to support Iraq's oil and gas infrastructure, including training 1,000 petroleum engineers. Iraq and Japan agreed to establish a joint committee to coordinate these bilateral projects [141]. In August 2006, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso visited Iraq and met his counterpart, as well as Iraq's PM Nouri al-Maliki, to discuss bilateral energy and reconstruction projects. The following year, al-Maliki visited Japan and met with Japanese Emperor Akihito, Empress Michiko, PM Shinzo Abe (2006–2020), and cabinet members and acknowledged Japan's reconstruction role and encouraged Japanese businesses to invest in Iraq, including the oil sector. The two PMs signed an agreement worth (\$865.7 million) for a loan from Japan to build fertiliser, refinery plants, water supply equipment, repair electricity supplies, an oil facility in Basrah, and it would be repaid by Iraq over 4 decades [142]. Other bilateral economic cooperation initiatives include the following: In 2009, Japan established the Iraq Desk at the Japan Cooperation Centre for the Middle East, which is supported by MOFA Japan and METI (in 2001 MITI was reorganised into the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI)), to focus on providing support and encouraging Japanese business engagement in Iraq. In the same year, in December, the Japan-Iraq Economic Forum was held, featuring a delegation from Japan led by Deputy Minister of METI Tadahiro Matsushita, Japan's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, and representatives from around 100 Japanese companies. The Iraqi delegation included PM al-Maliki and 10 other officials, accompanied by 200 representatives from both Iraq's public and private sectors [143]. However, a 2022 METI document mentions several countries, including Iraq, South Sudan, Lebanon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which are deemed high-risk countries concerning the transfer of sensitive technologies (including military-related technologies). Japanese companies will face scrutiny and undergo additional compliance procedures [144]. In the same vein, Japan's caution in deepening bilateral ties has also been evident in warnings to Japanese citizens to avoid non-essential travel, in strongly worded evacuation advisories, and in urging them to avoid visiting Iraq. Despite the bilateral rapprochement, Iraq's instability, ter-

rorist attacks (currently less frequent), and lack of transparency hinder certain aspects of extensive and deep economic and technological cooperation.

Japan expanded its diplomatic and business presence to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), manifesting a proactive use of positive instruments. Japan's involvement in the KR-I is largely due to its relative stability and security, making it an attractive location for Japanese ODA projects and investments from Japanese companies [145]. Japan's Ambassador to Iraq, Futoshi Matsumoto, stated that the "Kurdistan Region has prosperity and stability". The new Japanese Ambassador to Iraq, Akira Endo, and the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) officials recognise the importance of engaging Japanese companies in the KR-I, highlighting the investment opportunities for Japan [146]. While Japan has growing interest in the KR-I, Tokyo underscores Iraq's territorial integrity and calls for continued dialogue between Baghdad and Erbil, the KR-I's capital, to address unresolved issues [145]. In September 2008, Japan opened an Honorary Consulate in Erbil, the capital of the KR-I. This was later upgraded to a full consulate in 2017 after a visit by Japan's State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kentaro Sonoda, who met with top KRG officials. From 2007 onwards, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has been involved in several reconstruction and humanitarian ventures across the KR-I, including the development of power plants and water treatment plants, as well as humanitarian aid to internally displaced persons and Syrian refugees. Japanese firms have invested in the KR-I, notably Toyota Iraq, a major automotive company with hubs in Baghdad and Erbil. With support from the Japanese government, Toyota Iraq collaborates with UN-Habitat on reconstruction and infrastructure projects, including building 9,000 houses in Mosul after its liberation from the Islamic State [147].

In 2009, Iraq and Japan signed the Japan-Iraq Comprehensive Partnership. This 'strategic partnership,' initially conceived in March 2007 at MOFA Japan, encompassed cooperation in energy, capacity building, and investment promotion. It aimed to re-establish regular joint ministerial-level committee meetings across all ministries [148]. This marked a shift from previous terminology that focused solely on reconstruction activities, led by PM Koizumi. Critics, such as Penn (2007), argue that Japan's "strategic partnership" with Iraq is, in essence, a strategic alignment with the US. While the US has influenced Japan's foreign policy towards Iraq, Japan has also aimed to engage with Iraq independently, emphasising the enhancement of diplomatic relations, energy cooperation, trade, and infrastructure development [136, 149]. Penn (2007) argued that The 2009 Japan-Iraq Comprehensive Partnership was insubstantial. They suggested it was primarily an effort to distract from Iraq's instability and did not represent a significant change in Japan's foreign policy towards Iraq, which remained aligned with the US in the region [136]. Despite criticism, the Japan-Iraq partnership continued to show signs of activity, exemplified by a joint committee meeting in 2012 that brought together representatives from trade, oil, finance, agriculture, electricity, and health ministries [150]. Another example is an agreement to promote and protect investment between Japan and Iraq, signed in 2012 and taking effect in 2014. Since then, several attempts have been made to strengthen this partnership. Notably, Iraq's Foreign Minister al-Jafari made efforts in 2016, followed by Iraq's PM al-Sudani in 2022, when they met with Japanese officials to work on activating the joint committees [151, 152]. While the partnership has not delivered

on its promises, such as meeting annually in committees, it provides a foundation for building upon. Iraqi and Japanese officials made over 70 bilateral visits, including at the presidential, ministerial, and premiership levels, from 2003 to 2022 [153]. These exhibit the scale of cordial rapport and underline the expanding role of the dimension processes (negotiations and communication) that promoted the deployment of positive instruments since 2003. However, there are limitations to the progress of bilateral ties due to Iraq's systematic corruption, challenges within bureaucracy, poor coordination among governmental bodies, a lack of transparency across various sectors, and an underdeveloped private sector and infrastructure to attract investors, as well as concerns related to terrorism and militias, all of which are obstacles hindering the expansion of economic and political relations between Japan and Iraq [149]. A press release from Japan's embassy in Iraq highlights the importance of ensuring transparency, accountability, and efficiency in project implementation between Japan and Iraq [154]. These issues highlight Japan's concerns about Iraq's structural problems and weak state institutions.

Energy Ties Post-2003

Post-Saddam bilateral energy has advanced through positive economic diplomacy tools, such as state facilitation of firms' activities, official meetings, Japan's assistance and investments in Iraq's oil infrastructure, and energy agreements to secure energy production and supply [5, 13, 155]. Immediately after Saddam's fall, Mitsubishi Corp signed a contract with Iraq's SOMO for an initial shipment of two million oil barrels [141]. Japanese firms, such as JAPEX, provided technical assistance to the Iraqi Oil Ministry (IoM). In March 2005, JAPEX signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the IoM to assess undeveloped oil fields, jointly explore four regions, and provide technical support and training. In 2006, they studied ways to raise production [54].

In 2006, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso highlighted Iraq's importance for Japan's stable crude oil supply. That year, Iraq was Japan's 10th-largest oil supplier, providing 42,000 daily barrels worth \$991 million, a 75% increase from 2005 [142]. However, in 2006, Iraq exported less oil to Japan than other Gulf countries, such as Saudi Arabia (US\$37b), the United Arab Emirates (US\$31.5b oil and gas), Kuwait (US\$9.12b), Oman (US\$2.57b), and Qatar (US\$13.3b). This stresses Japan's increasingly diversifying energy supplies. Nonetheless, Japan continued its investment in Iraq. For example, in August 2009, Mitsubishi invested 5% in the Iraq-Shell gas project in Basra with the IoM and Shell. [156] In 2010, JAPEX signed a contract with the South Oil Company of IoM for development and production services for the Garraf field in southern Iraq [157]. In 2011, a Japanese symposium involved officials from both countries, and the Iraqi oil Deputy Minister stated that the IoM was in discussion with Japanese companies on new ventures. In May 2012, Japan's NPEX and Russia's LUKOIL were awarded the rights to explore oil. In 2017, INPEX announced that it had discovered oil deposits west of Basra, holding 40 per cent of the shares in 2020. The IoM offered Japan's JGC Holdings Corporation's Basra refinery upgrade project, in which JGC invested US\$4.6 billion and is scheduled for completion by 2026 [158].

Japan reduced its reliance on Iranian oil imports leading up to the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and again after the US withdrawal in 2018 under President Trump [159]. This created a temporary window of opportunity for Iraq to increase its energy exports to Japan, which did not materialise. Despite the successful deployment of positive tools between Baghdad and Tokyo, post-2003, Iraq's trade and energy ties are higher with China and South Korea. For instance, in 2016, the total trade between China and Iraq was USD17.4b, and Iraq and South Korea was US\$6.1b, whereas Iraq and Japan's total trade was US\$1.53b, and from 2019 to 2024, Iraq-Japan bilateral trade dropped to US\$ 916 m in 2023 [5]. In contrast, Japan's trade volume with other oil-rich countries in the region is higher than with Iraq. Please see Table 1 and Chart 2 to view the gap between Iraq and other energy-producing Middle Eastern countries. This disparity likely stems from persistent instability in Iraq, including the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and subsequent UN sanctions, and post-2003 Iraq's insurgency. Meanwhile, Japan has been promoting nuclear power, diversifying its oil and gas supply with significant LNG contributions from in and beyond the Middle East, such as Australia and Malaysia, 38 and 16%, respectively, in 2024 and Japan's investment in renewable energy [160, 161].

Conclusion

The study examines why and how economic diplomacy materialised between Japan and Iraq before and after 2003 by analysing the context in each phase of bilateral relations. The emergence of economic diplomacy depends on both countries' needs and interests in a given context, whether local, regional, global, or a combination of them. The context determines how economic diplomacy's processes and instruments occur and are exercised. All three dimensions have been scrutinised in the five stages of bilateral ties.

In stage one, before the 1950s, the lack of economic diplomacy between Iraq and Japan was due to the absence of formal ties, despite limited bilateral trade and a low level of Japanese diplomatic presence in Iraq. Additionally, the global context, namely during WWII and the period under British mandate in Iraq, and later the continuation of British influence after gaining its sovereignty until the 1958 military coup, constrained Iraq-Japan bilateral ties, as London and Tokyo were adversaries during WWII.

Stage two marks the appearance of some elements of economic diplomacy between Iraq and Japan due to the context of a new global order that appeared in the post-war era, and in Tokyo and Baghdad, there were new regimes. Japan's economic miracle began in the 1950s, necessitating its ties with the oil-rich countries, including Iraq. Therefore, positive instruments such as the 1964 trade agreement began to appear.

Stage three in the 1970s and 1980s displays fluctuating ties between positive (increased trade and investment) and negative (threats of sanctions) instruments due to changes in the context dimension, such as the 1973 OAPEC oil embargo and the Iran-Iraq war. The former comprises the process dimension of proactive engagement, where Japan and OAPEC, including Iraq, negotiated. Japan overcame the challenge through diplomatic support for Arab states and positive instruments and measures

such as investments in Iraq's energy infrastructure. Stage four in the 1990s demonstrates the lowest level of bilateral relations since its inception in the mid-20th century and the usage of negative instruments due to the context of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the UN sanctions on Iraq.

The fifth stage crystallises the revival of Iraq-Japan relations, mainly due to changes in the global and regional context, namely Japan's participation in the US-led coalition in the Iraq war, the toppling of Saddam, and Iraq's new political system and elites. Post-2003 shows an unprecedented number of official meetings and summits that include process dimensions such as negotiations and communication to revive bilateral ties, the extensive use of positive instruments from Japan's reconstruction projects throughout Iraq, and the expansion of trade and diplomatic relations with the KR-I. Although bilateral trade peaked, Japan's oil and gas imports have decreased significantly since 2019, partly due to Japan's diversification in energy sources beyond Iraq and to Japan's investment in renewable energy. Moreover, this phase of bilateral relations faces challenges, including militias in Iraq (such as Shia militias), corruption, weak bureaucratic institutions, and a lack of transparency in Iraq.

Since the third stage, Iraq-Japan relations have been influenced by Japan's reliance on the US security guarantees. While the US influence on Iraq-Japan relations was prominent during the Iraq War, as Japan joined the US-led coalition, Japan's involvement in Iraq was limited to humanitarian and reconstruction efforts as Japan trod a delicate line. During the 1973 oil crisis, Japan demonstrated pragmatism and pursued its own interests, despite US dissatisfaction with Japan's diplomatic siding with the Arab position to secure energy supplies. In the following decades in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Japan continued to balance between the Arab states, Israel, and the US, but not at the expense of the US strategic interests [162].

Bilateral relations could be enhanced beyond fossil fuels through further positive instruments. The absence of a colonial past and the lack of psychological barriers from the Iraqi side could improve ties between Iraq and Japan [149]. First, while talks began in 2021 on Japan's investment in renewable energy in Iraq, more concrete steps could be taken. Second, joint committees should be revitalised within the comprehensive agreement across all ministries. Third, there is an opportunity for greater cooperation between small- and mid-sized businesses, research institutes, and universities in both countries. Finally, Japan's support in developing Iraq's economic digitisation could help Iraq tackle corruption and a lack of transparency.

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Declarations

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