

Speech by Foreign Minister HAYASHI Yoshimasa
at the Third Japan-Arab Political Dialogue
September 5, 2023

1. Introduction

Chairman, Honorable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen, assalam alaikum jameean.

I am truly honored to join, as co-chair, the third Japan-Arab Political Dialogue here at the historic headquarters of the League of Arab States.

Today, the international community is at a historic turning point. Russia's aggression against Ukraine is shaking the very foundation of the international order from which all of us have benefitted.

We are also witnessing growing tensions in East Asia.

Any attempt to unilaterally change the status quo by force is unacceptable anywhere in the world.

I do not need to preach how horrible it would be to live in the world "ruled by force" to my colleagues here, who represent the Arab World that has gone through numerous disturbances of war.

Now is the time to unite to uphold the free and open international order based on the rule of law.

2. Current situation in the Middle East

Looking at the Middle East, though we still witness prolonged conflicts in many places, there is a beacon of hope.

A new momentum for cooperation is emerging in various places in the region, such as normalization of Saudi-Iran relations, and improvement of relations between Israel and some Arab states.

These developments could bring about more active regional interaction and eventually, stabilization.

As the international community is wavering and the situation in the Middle East is evolving so dynamically, our way of cooperation would also have to change.

Energy security continues to be an essential element in Japan's policy toward the region.

But our relationship should not stop there.

Rather, in this tumultuous period, we should become closer "partners" that tackle challenges together.

3. Deepening Japan-Arab relationship under "three pillars"

Starting today, Japan would like to deepen our relationship with the Arab World at multiple levels by intensively working on the following "three pillars."

(1) Pillar 1: "Collaboration toward prosperity"

The first pillar is "collaboration toward prosperity."

It is an effort to strengthen our economic relationship from a long-term perspective in a wide range of areas, through undertakings such as business promotion, development of human resources, and addressing new challenges including climate change.

With the total population of more than 460 million and the GDP of about 3.5 trillion dollars, the Arab World has a potential of becoming a gigantic market.

It is also endowed with tourist attractions.

Japan, on the other hand, has a mature market, high-quality technology and human resources, globally competent firms and spirited start-ups.

Together, we can create wonderful synergies.

Japan will work on improving business environment, including establishing legal frameworks and holding business forums in the Arab World.

Through such measures, the Japanese Government will actively encourage Japanese companies to expand their operations to the Middle East, and help the region diversify their economy and industries.

We are now preparing for the Japan-Arab Economic Forum in Japan next year, for the first time since 2019.

The Forum will serve as a wonderful opportunity to encourage Japanese companies to understand the appeal of investment toward the Arab World.

We will also strengthen cooperation in the field of culture, sports, education and science.

Japanese style education at the Egyptian Japanese Schools (EJS) and the Egypt-Japan University of Science and Technology (E-JUST) serve as the model case of Japan's "Investment in People" approach.

Following last year's successful COP 27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, this year, COP 28 will be held in Dubai.

Countries that used to be known for their natural resources have now become flagbearers of decarbonization.

When Prime Minister Kishida visited the Gulf states this July, he presented his vision of the Middle East as a global supply hub for clean energy and critical minerals.

Japan will transform the traditional "oil producer-consumer" relationship and together tackle new challenges such as climate change.

(2) Pillar 2: “Initiative toward consolidation of peace”

Now, the second pillar is “initiative toward consolidation of peace.”

Faced with lingering conflicts, the Middle East needs “consolidation” of peace, not ephemeral tranquility.

Without solving the Palestinian question, peace will not come to the region in the true sense.

Japan’s position to support a “two-state solution” is unwavering.

For decades, Japan has been supporting confidence-building and economic self-reliance of Palestine, which serve as the foundation of the peace process.

In fact, Japan had become a donor country for UNRWA even before Japan itself joined the United Nations.

Our assistance for UNRWA has surpassed 1 billion dollars in total.

Japan’s own initiative is also bearing fruit. Palestinian companies which are operating in the Jericho Agro Industrial Park (JAIP), are increasing in numbers, and JAIP is now preparing for further expansion.

However, JAIP is facing issues of how to attract companies as new tenants and how to tap a new market.

I very much welcome support from Arab states for this important initiative.

Japan has also been providing long-term assistance for countries such as Syria, Libya, Yemen, Iraq and Sudan where the situation remains volatile.

Japan will stay engaged with the conviction that it is dialogue, not military might, that brings lasting political stability.

Japan will also deepen dialogues and cooperation under the regional cooperative frameworks such as the Arab League, GCC, and OIC.

On top of that, we will work on widening the range of minilateral cooperation, including the one we have with Jordan and Egypt.

This May, Japan signed an agreement with UAE on the transfer of defense equipment and technology, the first of its kind between Japan and the Arab World.

Also, with the support of Jordan and Djibouti, Japan conducted an exercise on the rescue of Japanese nationals overseas last December. Again, this is the first of its kind taken place in the Middle East.

Japan will continue promoting cooperation in the area of security and defense in the way that contributes to peace and stability in the region.

(3) Pillar 3: “Efforts through dialogue and practice toward maintaining and strengthening the free and open international order based on the rule of law”

Now, the last pillar is “efforts through dialogue and practice toward maintaining and strengthening the free and open international order based on the rule of law.”

I admit this name is a little lengthy, but each element of it holds significance.

The concept of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)” is to foster the Indo-Pacific region into a free and open “international public goods” that values freedom and the rule of law, free from force or coercion.

It focuses on the region where countless people from the Arab World had steered ships and prospered for hundreds of years.

As you can see, the concept of FOIP is undergirded by universal principles such as freedom, openness, and the rule of law.

FOIP is not aimed at forming a bloc.

However, it is also a sad reality that such obvious principles are not necessarily observed.

Especially, there would be a devastating impact if those principles are trampled in the Middle East, a focal point of maritime traffic as represented by the Suez Canal where about 20,000 vessels navigate annually, as well as the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Strait of Hormuz, the main artery for energy transportation.

From ancient times, the Middle East, known as “crossroads of the world,” has built glorious civilizations and enjoyed prosperity by positively accepting people and culture from outside.

And its diversity, inclusiveness and openness are also shared by the concept of FOIP.

Japan, both by word and by deed, will strive to spread understanding of FOIP in the region and consequently, to be able to work with the Arab World toward maintaining and strengthening the free and open international order based on the rule of law.

In fact, regional cooperation is already in progress, such as assistance for safe navigation in the Suez Canal and development of Port of Aden.

As another contribution to navigational safety in the region, we have been deploying naval vessels and patrol aircrafts of the Japan Self-Defense Forces for counter-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden.

In the future, Japan will put our cooperation into practice in wider areas, such as triangular cooperation for East Africa.

4. Conclusion

Excellencies,

To this day, Japan has provided need-based, long-term support for the Arab World to tackle their challenges.

In doing so, we never imposed particular values.

This is how we have built trusting relationships.

As the situation is changing dynamically in the Middle East and the world, now is the time for us to push our relationship forward based on the trust we have built.

I very much look forward to discussing with Excellencies how we can cooperate moving forward.

Thank you. Shukran jazelan.

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