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Prime Minister Fumio Kishida: Why APEC in S.F. carries a special significance for Japan

As prime minister of Japan, I was delighted to hear APEC would be held in San Francisco. The city by the bay is historically important to our nation.

By **Fumio Kishida**

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According to Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, pictured, San Francisco has played a historically important role in furthering U.S.-Japanese relations.

Office of the Prime Minister of Japan

When I first heard that the 2023 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation leaders meeting would be held in San Francisco, I could not have been more pleased. The city by the bay is historically important to Japan. It was the first port city to be visited by the first Japanese envoy to the United States in 1860, and it was pivotal to the Iwakura Mission in 1871, which marked the beginning of the modernization of Japan. In 1869, members of the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony migrated to San Francisco before establishing the first Japanese-American agricultural transplantation site in North America in Gold Hill. Furthermore, the San Francisco Peace Treaty signed in 1951 restored Japan's independence and brought it back into the international community.

I lived in New York City for three years in the 1960s when I was in elementary school. I remember how impressed I was when Mashi Murakami, a San Francisco Giants pitcher at the time, became the first Japanese player for a Major League Baseball team and pitched against the Mets in Shea Stadium. Inspired by his performance, I returned to Japan and played on my high school baseball team.

San Francisco has long served as a gateway for many Japanese people who sought to immigrate to the U.S. mainland, including those from my home prefecture of Hiroshima. Japanese immigrants and their descendants have overcome many obstacles and today hold honored positions in American society, carrying on Japanese culture and traditions, and have contributed greatly to the development of Japan-U.S. relations at the grassroots level.

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Today, approximately 20,000 Japanese residents live in the San Francisco metropolitan area, where a variety of Japanese companies, including manufacturers and technology firms, are based. These endeavors have been immensely beneficial for both of our countries. Japanese companies ranked first in cumulative direct investment in the U.S. for four consecutive years since 2019 (approximately \$775.2 billion in 2022), and through such direct investment, Japanese companies have created approximately 963,000 jobs (in 2021) in the United States. Active investment and job creation have provided a solid foundation for the unprecedentedly sound Japan-U.S. relationship.

At this year's APEC, under the theme of "Creating a Resilient and Sustainable Future for All", President Joe Biden has set three priorities, to be: interconnected, innovative and inclusive. I am determined to partner with the president to advance these priorities at the meeting, as they are a continuation of the goals Japan has been working toward with the United States for over 40 years.

After taking office in 1978, Prime Minister Masayoshi Ohira, one of my political mentors, launched the Pacific Basin Cooperation Concept, to advocate cooperation among the region's nations. In the 1980s, trade in the Pacific region surpassed trade in the Atlantic region. Today, the Asia-Pacific region has become the world's growth center, accounting for about 40% of the world's population, 50% of trade volume and 60% of gross domestic product.

Since the inception of APEC in 1989, Japan has promoted the liberalization of trade and investment within the Asia-Pacific region and regional economic integration for the sustainable growth and prosperity of the region. We are proud of the concrete results of these efforts, including important milestones like the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement on Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement.

More currently, Japan recognizes the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework as an indication of the United States' positive commitment to the Indo-Pacific region. We welcome this effort and will actively contribute to the formation of international rules to strengthen cooperation for high-standard trade rules, supply chain resilience and the transition to clean energy, as well as improving anti-corruption and taxation systems so that each country can enjoy substantial benefits.

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Japan and the United States remain responsible for maintaining the international order in the Indo-Pacific region. To this end, we believe that it is desirable for the U.S. to return to the Trans-Pacific Partnership to help advance a free and fair economic order in the region.

It was also the year of the G7 Presidency for Japan. At the G7 Hiroshima Summit, we discussed the challenges facing the international community and confirmed that we will work together with a wide range of partners beyond the G7 to address these issues. As Japan advocates for a “free and open Indo-Pacific,” the G7 Hiroshima Summit also treated the situation in the region as one of its priorities. It is very meaningful that the United States, which also advocates for a free and open Indo-Pacific, is vigorously promoting economic cooperation in the region as the APEC chair country.

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Japan and the United States have each played a leading role as chairs of important international frameworks this year. Needless to say, the basis for both frameworks was the solid U.S.-Japan partnership.

The U.S. and Japan account for about 30% of the world's economic activity (\$29.7 trillion in 2022), and the economic relationship between the two countries, along with security and people-to-people exchange, is one of the three elements supporting the Japan-U.S. alliance, with the two economies deeply integrated through trade and investment.

The so-called “Economic 2+2” — a framework for discussing diplomacy, security and the economy as a whole — will also be held in San Francisco during the APEC summit. There we will expand and deepen Japan-U.S. cooperation in the economic field, including the realization of sustained and comprehensive growth in the Indo-Pacific region.

With APEC, San Francisco, once the gateway for Japanese immigrants, continues to play a role as one of the bases for mutual exchange between the United States and Japan. I will continue to do my utmost to further strengthen and develop this special Japan-San Francisco relationship and to take the unwavering Japan-U.S. relationship to new heights.

Fumio Kishida is prime minister of Japan.

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