

Japan's Ties with the Middle East in a New Age of Synergy, Mutual Prosperity, and Cooperation

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I. Introductory Remarks

Al-salam alaikum.

Here I am in Saudi Arabia once again. It's been six years since my last visit and I am very much delighted to be back here.

Looking back in our mutual past, the first time that the representative of your government came to Japan was back in 1938, only six years after the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded. That is to say, exactly 75 years have elapsed since then.

I consider my visit this time to be a major milestone. I want to help engineer an entirely new relationship marked by ties that extend into an entirely new dimension between Japan and

Saudi Arabia, and between Japan and the Middle East as a whole.

II. A Quantum Expansion in Industrial Cooperation, from Agriculture to Medicine

I have been accompanied this time by many of Japan's top business and industrial leaders.

Petro Rabigh, as a joint venture between Saudi Aramco and Sumitomo Chemical, has solidified its reputation as one of the world's leading ethylene centres.

Toyota Motor Corporation went all out in helping grow the Saudi-Japanese Automobile High Institute. The institute has

already trained easily more than a thousand automotive engineers.

Isuzu Motors recently inaugurated a new truck assembly plant in Saudi Arabia. That was in December last year.

These companies and their Japanese staff are genuinely committed to training future generations of Saudi Arabian engineers in the core essentials of manufacturing craftsmanship as bred in Japan.

There are some who are eager to put fresh Japanese crops on your tables in the Middle East. From the field of medicine there are also others who yearn to contribute their expertise, for instance, in diagnostic imaging and emergency medicine to the medical advancement and the expansion of health care throughout the region.

Japanese solar panels are already known for their durability. I am confident that the collaboration between us, Japan and the Middle East, will equip the panels with

further resistance against harsher environment such as sand storm. New sources of electric power you will develop, using Japanese assistance, will put you at the core of the vast grid stretching from Asia to Europe.

As a country where its water system has amongst the lowest leakage rates in the world, I am certain that Japan will also be able to make contributions to the development of modern water infrastructure in the Middle East.

Does anyone here have any idea as to how much water is being leaked in Tokyo? Only 3 per cent. Can you then guess what that rate was a half-century ago? As much as 30 per cent. If Japan has done that, then there is no reason why you cannot do the same. We want to help make it happen.

In the years ahead, Japan and the Middle East will make a leap beyond the dimension of trading oil and gas and strengthen our economic and business ties all across the sectors. That process will place our mutual relations on

a significantly higher level and lead us into an era of expanded cooperation hitherto beyond imagination.

III. Keyword One: Coexistence and Co-prosperity (al-ta'aish)

When you combine Japan's industrial prowess with the vitality of a young and vibrant Middle East, a Middle East of promising growth, and a Middle East that aspires to achieving industrial advancement, how might that synergy materialize? The answer is that it will translate into enormous growth opportunities for both the Middle East and Japan.

Now in my country, I have launched a three-pronged package of stimulus measures designed to revive the Japanese economy. Those three prongs, or arrows as I call them, are monetary policies, fiscal policies, and economic growth strategies. I am now shooting them in one fell swoop, resolutely and swiftly, so

that Japan could gain vitality afresh.

Economically vibrant again, Japan should be ready to work with you toward finding solutions to the challenges you face. Working with you in the Middle East, a resurgent Japan would bring over here its industrial experiences, know-hows, and technologies, while creating jobs and, as your running mate, jointly climbing up the value ladder.

Long gone are the days when bilateral relationships were defined by a one way street with you selling oil on one end and us buying your oil on the other end. Even within the domain of energy resources, Japan stands ready to transfer such technologies as for the renewables or for nuclear power generation, which rank among the safest in the world.

Japan and the Middle East are partners that share the same interests and concerns. For Japan and the Middle East, the 21st century will be a century of

coexistence and co-prosperity, or al-ta'aish.

IV. Keyword Two: Collaboration (al-ta'aun)

Making a leap beyond conventional business boundary, Japan and the Middle East will make yet another leap beyond our business-centric connections by strengthening our ties in politics as well as in security.

November last year, Japan voted for a UN resolution according Palestine "non-member observer state" status.

My country has shown understanding for the earnest desire of the Palestinians to establish their own independent state, and supported their right for self-determination. We have supported the "two-state solution" that would allow Israel and a future Palestinian state to achieve a peaceful and secure coexistence. These were the positions behind

our decision to vote in favour of the UN resolution.

However, the hardest part just lies ahead. Both parties, the Palestinians and the Israelis, have a responsibility to enter into direct negotiations as soon as possible and redouble their efforts to achieve a lasting peace.

The countries of the Middle East also have an obligation to exercise their wisdom and powers of influence in the interest of bringing about a two-state solution. Furthermore, we cannot close our eyes to the tragedy that's unfolding in Syria or the Iranian nuclear issue.

The entire region from the Middle East to North Africa is at a historic crossroads. That is precisely why efforts must be made to remove destabilizing factors now in play. Beyond that crossroads we must turn the region into a stage: an unshakable stage where people earn hope and enduring growth, and enjoy both stability and prosperity.

It is my pledge, to that end, Japan work with you. I say this to the people in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey among others, that let us roll up our sleeves and work together to achieve region-wide stability.

Collaboration, or al-ta'āun with you is what my country is after.

V. 2.2 Billion Dollars Assistance for the Middle East and North Africa

To that end, during this tour visiting Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Turkey, I will make a proposal to each one of them that Japan should launch a security dialogue.

I for one should like to come to the Middle East again and again. Indeed my next proposal is to enhance summit dialogue between me and your heads of state. I should like to make it a regular practice for the security planners from Japan and the

Middle East to meet and collaborate.

But that is not all. Here, I am pleased to be telling you that my government has decided to provide the region with financial assistance amounting to 2.2 billion US Dollars, aiming at helping you to build lasting peace and stability in the region. It is in other words to substantiate our cooperation, or al-ta'āun.

Now is the time for us to pool our wisdom, and aim higher and farther. I am asking you that you make my country, Japan, an integral part of your dream.

Exactly for us, Japan and the Middle East, to aim higher, we have a pilot project. Called the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity, it is a project that involves Israel, Jordan and Palestine. One single absentee among the three could ruin the entire project, for it really takes the trio.

The project is designed to transform an area of Jordan Valley into productive, fertile land

and give the young people in the West Bank area a promising opportunity to experience the fruits of their diligent labour. I look forward to welcoming fast-growing companies in the Middle East joining the Corridor project.

VI. Keyword Three: Harmony and Tolerance (al-tasāmuh)

And now I am going to discuss harmony and tolerance, what you call al-tasāmuh.

For many in my country, nothing is nobler than the perspiration of diligent labour. According to their belief, the sense of harmony and tolerance grows when you perspire working together, and upon which you share your sense of accomplishment

In the olden days, Japanese people cultivated a tradition of enjoying the fruits of their labour year after year by sharing water resources, pooling their manpower, and helping one another to overcome scarcity. This

fostered a way of life that was principled on harmony and tolerance.

To be frank, I had an assumption that the hustle- bustle and pressures of modernity and changing patterns of work had weakened that way of life. However, the tragedy of the recent Great East Japan Earthquake taught me that I was mistaken.

Despite enduring hardships and sufferings almost beyond words, people in the quake and tsunami-stricken areas still did what they could to help and console one another and share scarce emergency supplies. We were deeply moved by the principled spirit of tolerance underpinning their attitude.

Let me give you another example.

Manufacturing workplaces in Japan typically do not utilize the divisions of labour that are quite common at factories in Europe or North America. For example, workers on Japanese assembly

lines also handle the task of identifying defects themselves.

Hence, on the one hand, you have the perspective of workers that want to find defects but on the other, you have the perspective of those that do not want any defects to be found.

Although these duties traditionally have been marked by this conflict of interest, manufacturing plants in Japan were probably the first to have merged those conflicting interests in the individual workers.

Why? It is because what drives them is the higher purpose they share in such dedication that when they are at the assembly line, they must make the best possible products. In effect, modern manufacturing plants in Japan have in this way sustained a culture that gains satisfaction through mutual cooperation guided by the interest of meeting the higher aim of crafting quality products. The spirit of harmony and tolerance is alive and well among modern Japanese workers.

This was exactly the reason why I was delighted to hear that Saudi Arabia and the UAE had given us a request that Japan ought to send technical advisors to their governments and organizations and, not be concerned about the expenses involved.

Let me make an announcement now that very soon, my country is going to launch with countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE what we call a “cost-sharing technical assistance” framework. This new approach will involve the deployment of highly experienced JICA specialists, with the associated costs to be defrayed by the host countries.

I believe that JICA’s engineers will be able to transfer their know-hows as masters of their manufacturing crafts and at the same time serve as “missionaries” capable of cultivating a spirit of cooperation, attitude of harmony and tolerance among the people they are going to work with.

Conversely, I also believe that those Japanese engineers,

through their deep interactions with the local people, will gain first-hand knowledge about your faith: that you love others; that you accept others; and deep in the faith of Islam you have the richest possible reservoir of tolerance. They will learn tremendously from your al-ta'āish, al-ta'āun, and al-tasāmuh and return to Japan as missionaries able to convey your wisdom to the people in Japan.

VII. Broad-based Personnel Exchange to Cultivate Future Advocates of Harmony and Tolerance

This is why -- and I will conclude with these closing thoughts -- I want to increase our exchanges at the people-to-people and academic levels with the countries of the Middle East such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Turkey.

I am of a view that most government officials in Japan are unselfish, upright individuals that work hard at their jobs. Some

countries in the Middle East have voiced interest in sending their public officials to Japan to have them learn more about these qualities of public service in Japan.

I know that people in the Middle East, regardless of their nationality or the political system they live under, all desire that their society be bribery-free and orderly. If Japan can be in a position to be of any assistance in that area, nothing else would make us more proud as Japanese.

Over the next five years, my government will invite business trainees from the Middle East and send in return to the region Japanese instructors. The two way exchanges should amount to 20,000 people.

We also plan to increase the number of Middle Eastern students studying in Japan. Over the past seven years, the number from Saudi Arabia has expanded from 30 to 500. From the UAE around 60 students are currently in Japan but that total, too,

should be increased to 500. The number of female students among them, I am sure, will soar to something like several dozen.

I started my address today with the subject of two “leaps.” One leap involves a transformation from our resource-centric relationship to the one marked by full-scale economic ties and a quest for coexistence and co-prosperity. The second leap comprises an evolution from purely economic ties to a relationship marked by cooperation in the quest for regional peace, stability, and growth.

This process will give rise to a relationship of multifaceted synergy. In other words, ties traditionally defined by energy will be supplanted by ties of full-fledged synergy.

That development in turn will foster an even stronger relationship of collaboration, coexistence, and co-prosperity between Japan and the countries of the Middle East. To assist the

region in building a foundation for hope and powerful economic growth in the years ahead, Japan will pour its resources into a quest for collaboration, coexistence and co-prosperity with the region. Those resources will include 2.2 billion dollar assistance together with implementation of training programs for approximately 20,000 trainees and deployed specialists.

VIII. Closing Remarks

Now, here is what is happening in Abu Dhabi. Responding to strong requests from the local community, we have decided to open our Japanese school for the local children to get enrolled. Imagine those young children, who are our future leaders, studying side-by-side. Imagine they are laughing and smiling, engaged in joyful extra-curricular activities, like sports and arts festivals that Japanese schools are renowned for. That, I believe, is the vision of our future.

Before I bring my speech to a close, I would like to pay from the bottom of my heart my sincerest tribute to the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, for its contributions to the history of humankind as well as to the history of the world. That is the organization that had its root in a proposal by His Majesty the King himself.

The Centre has been engaged in an unending drive to encourage dialogue aimed at bridging the gaps between different religions and nurturing a lasting spirit of tolerance. I can think of no other institution that equally embodies and crystalizes the ideals of coexistence, co-prosperity, collaboration, and a spirit of tolerance, or al-ta'aish, al-ta'aun, and al-tasamuh.

With that my own beacon of hope, I also promise that the government of Japan will work harder to enrich our mutual understandings between Japan and the Middle East. I promise that my government will further

enhance dialogue among the Japanese and Middle Eastern intellectual leaders, who will seek even better and deeper ways for us to do more together.

In closing, let me note that I expect to be back in the Middle East again in the not-so-distant future.

Shukran Jazeelan.