

**Speech by H.E. Taro Kono,
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan
at the IISS Manama Dialogue
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Director-General Chipman, Honorable Ministers,
Distinguished guests,
Good afternoon, or good evening already.
I am Taro Kono, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan,
and I am honored to be the very first Foreign Minister
of Japan to attend this Manama Dialogue.

When I assumed my position as the Foreign Minister
this past August, I announced that we would pay close
attention and give high priority to our relationship
with the Middle East. Since then, many people have
asked me, “Why are you putting so much effort into
the Middle East?” In fact, this question came as a
surprise to me, since the importance of the stability of
the Middle East to the entire world is self-evident. It

remains the same for Japan, which is 8,300km away from Manama.

Some of you may wonder, “Why does Japan need to be engaged in the Middle East?” or “Can Japan actually make any contribution in this complicated Middle East?” As the Foreign Minister of Japan, I would proudly like to respond to such questions, with “There are things only Japan can do.”

Japan is unique because we have remained neutral religiously and ethnically, and we have not left any negative footprint historically in the Middle East. Japan has always remained as a peaceful nation for over 70 years after World War II, continually practicing peace diplomacy with so-called soft power, without exercising coercion or force. It is my belief that Japan can make further contributions to stability in the Middle East in a way that only Japan can do.

So, what are the unique efforts that only Japan can make in the Middle East? To answer that question, let me discuss how Japan intends to provide assistance for stability and security in the Middle East.

I expressed the basic policy of Japan's diplomacy regarding the Middle East at the First Japan-Arab Political Dialogue in Cairo in September, as the "Kono Four Principles." These are: 1) Intellectual and human contribution, 2) Investment in "People," 3) Enduring efforts, and 4) Enhancing political efforts.

Japan's actions to assist stabilization and security in the Middle East will naturally come along with these four Principles.

To start with, we will take measures to promote co-existence in Middle Eastern societies under the first principle, "intellectual and human contributions."

The fight against Daesh in Syria and Iraq is about to

end from a military aspect. From now on, it is necessary to prevent its resurgence by healing the scars left by violent extremism, and making sure to promote building societies that can tolerate and respect diversity in the region. In order to support this effort, Japan will increase cooperation and exchanges in the field of education. We have already invited teachers from Islamic schools in Asian countries to study how Japan developed its economy after the war and to learn the importance of societal roles. I would like to have such exchanges with Middle Eastern countries as well next year.

As part of our efforts to overcome violent extremism, Japan will support arms collection by the Government of Iraq through assisting with vocational training, job creation, and business start-ups. Unlike the United States or Europe, nobody has guns in Japan, and we know the importance of guns and weapons control. In this regard, if circumstances permit, we would like to host an international conference in the first half of

next year in Tokyo. In support of overcoming violent extremism, Japan has provided assistance for the rehabilitation of inmates, for example, in Morocco, and will continue to do so.

Needless to say, we will continue providing our assistance to countries affected by the fight against Daesh and others. Regarding Syria and its neighboring countries, we have recently decided to provide additional humanitarian assistance of around \$21 million U.S. dollars. As a result, this year alone, Japan's assistance in total will reach over \$100 million U.S. dollars for all Syrian people in need inside Syria and around \$320 million U.S. dollars in Iraq, Syria and its neighboring countries.

That said, under the second principle, "Investment in People," Japan will take concrete steps in promoting reforms in Middle Eastern countries.

While the political and economic environment is fast

changing, as seen in volatile energy prices, many countries in the Middle East are making efforts to bring about reforms. Implementing such reforms in a successful manner is essential for the long-term stability in the region. Japan's public and private sectors have already been participating in economic reforms in many countries.

I would like to stress the importance of every effort to improve resilience in societies with economic reforms. Japan especially values the necessity of "human resources development" as people are at the center of building societies. We would like to share our expertise, experience, and technology, in areas such as security, disaster risk reduction, criminal justice, as well as nuclear non-proliferation and safety. In making such efforts, Japan would like to not only make active use of the Official Development Aid (ODA) for the developing countries, but also use cost-sharing technical cooperation in which the associated costs are borne by recipient countries with high incomes.

Furthermore, Japan will intensify its efforts in line

with the third principle, “Enduring Efforts.”

Considering the current situation concerning the Middle East Peace Process, Japan will continue and even enhance its long-standing support for efforts to bring peace in the region by facilitating confidence building and economic development of Palestine.

Japan supports a two-state solution. The issue should be settled through negotiations between the parties, based on the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and relevant agreements among the parties. Japan has been promoting the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative in the region.

This initiative requires regional cooperation with parties including Palestine, Israel and Jordan, and has promoted confidence building even in difficult times. Its flagship project, “Jericho Agro-Industrial Park” or “JAIP,” which just marked its 10th anniversary, has already been producing tangible results. Japan intends to work with the relevant parties to upgrade JAIP, and would like to see its products exported, through Jordan, to the Gulf countries, and eventually to the

world. I seek your support for this project, which brings jobs, and more importantly, hope to the Palestinians. Furthermore, I do hope that this initiative helps lay the ground work for a progress in the Peace Process.

Lastly, the fourth principle, “Enhancing political efforts,” will also be implemented in the context of stabilization of the Middle East.

Our history of neutrality in the Middle East that I mentioned earlier enables Japan to act as an honest facilitator of dialogues. I am certain Japan can play this role within and outside the region to make progress toward achieving regional stability.

We complement efforts made by some countries in the region.

Today, there are several challenges for regional security. The recent development in Yemen has just added another complexity to the situation where millions of innocent Yemenis are already suffering from the cholera outbreak and other dire humanitarian

conditions. We are also facing a challenge of promoting national reconciliation in Iraq, Syria, and Libya. These challenges need to be resolved through constructive and meaningful dialogues.

From now on, Japan will try what it can to advance dialogues and exchanges toward resolving such major issues that can threaten regional security.

Of course, the dialogues need to be held among the relevant stakeholders, and Japan does not intend to force them to come to the table and talk. As an honest facilitator of dialogues, Japan will present various ideas to each stakeholder, listen to each opinion in a careful manner, and promote dialogues that deal with each issue, so that various challenges can be solved.

This is the overall picture of Japan's planned contributions to stabilization and security in the Middle East.

I trust you can see that the direction that I have just laid out is our wish to move ahead hand in hand with our friends in the Middle East by utilizing Japan's soft power tools.

I started my speech stressing the importance of the stability in the Middle East. And now we see its significance growing in a broader strategic context.

The Middle East and Asia have a long history of close engagement. Back in the 13th century, Islam traveled from the Middle East to South East Asia, bringing with it new culture and technology. The Middle East geopolitically connects Asia and Africa, and has become a hub of energy resources, financial dealings, and commodity distribution, with several critically important maritime chokepoints.

For these reasons, the Middle East is vital to our "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy." Maintaining free and open maritime order between Africa and Asia is

crucial for stability and prosperity in the region. Japan, together with like-minded countries, is trying to uphold the free and open maritime order and improve connectivity from eastern coast of Africa, such as Djibouti or Mombasa, Kenya, to even west coast of the United States. The Middle East sits in the middle of our Indo-Pacific strategy. Maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East itself is essential to ensure the free and open maritime order. I would like to invite each country in the region to discuss how we can make the Indo-Pacific into new international public goods.

Moreover, it becomes increasingly clear that we need to expand our cooperation with the Middle East to a wider strategic context. In this regard, consider North Korea, which is now an unprecedented, grave and imminent threat. We need even closer coordination in the whole international society. For example, remittance from North Korean workers across the region has funded its nuclear and missile development. Active cooperation by Middle Eastern countries on

North Korean issues is indispensable to enhance pressure on North Korea. Full implementation of relevant UN Security Council resolutions is vital, and we ask for your further cooperation. We could also cooperate more closely on the spread of violent extremism that has now reached Asia, as shown by the situation in Mindanao in the Philippines. Here, we can together address the problem through showing to the world what Islam really is, a religion informed by moderation.

In conclusion, Japan is ready to play a role in the region as a partner. I believe Japan and the Middle East can go further as partners to collaborate in a much broader global efforts for peace and stability. I look forward to deepening our discussions on our new ways of collaborating for years to come. Thank you very much.