

**Speech by H.E. Taro Kono,
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan
at the IISS Manama Dialogue
October 27, 2018**

Good afternoon.

I am honored to be back to the Manama Dialogue after becoming the first Foreign Minister of Japan to attend last year.

This year, I am here to emphasize our support for the reforms and modernization currently underway across the Middle East, as I believe these reforms are the basis for the future of the Middle East.

Countries in the region are striving to overcome both on-going and emerging challenges, including the alleviation of fiscal dependency on oil revenues, the creation of sufficient and decent job opportunities for a growing youth population, and the promotion of women's participation in society.

These countries have made important progress and paved the way for reform for future generations. We cannot let their efforts fail.

Based on this belief, Japan remains committed to supporting these regional efforts and would like to share our own experience of modernization and reforms. Although there is no “one-size-fits-all” model for national reforms, I believe there are elements of Japan’s experience that these countries can use.

A highlight of Japan’s modernization was its investment in human capital.

In the 150 years following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan has successfully industrialized and modernized, while also preserving Japanese values.

A key to this success was the abolition of the hierarchical governing system and the introduction of a new, merit-based recruitment system for the government that provided every Japanese national with opportunities to participate in nation building.

Its most striking example may be the first prime minister of Japan, Hirobumi Ito. Although he was born in 1841 to a lower-class samurai, he distinguished himself in the new Meiji government with his extensive capacities for negotiations and taking action in the formation of new government. His rise demonstrates how effective the new, merit-based system was.

Another key factor that brought about Japan's successful modernization and reform was its educational infrastructure, which was already robust even before the Restoration. This educational environment gave people like Ito the opportunity to study at prominent local schools that accepted young men from a range of classes.

Along with this example, there is other evidence that investment in education is important to national development. In fact, the countries at the top of the World Bank's 2018 human capital index invest a large amount in education, a commonality that has been a key to their success.

Now I would like to outline our ideas on how we plan to use our past experiences as we collaborate on reform efforts in the region.

First, we are working with Middle East countries to help reform their education systems.

For example, Japan is supporting the Egyptian government's efforts to develop school activities by introducing the Japanese style of education. Last month, 35 new Egypt-Japan Schools opened and are expected to contribute to the development of academic, social and physical skills through the Japanese child education system. Our system promotes the balanced development of students' physical, emotional and intellectual abilities through "special activities" which include students' cleaning their classroom by themselves. When this system was introduced in Egypt, parents objected at first, saying cleaning the classrooms is not students' job. However, after a trial run, students started to take the initiative to clean their own houses, and parents were persuaded. These special activities promote students' own initiatives in their everyday lives.

Second, we are assisting with vocational training programs.

In Saudi Arabia, Japan has helped train over 10,000 Saudi engineers and staff through public and private vocational programs. Japan also launched a new initiative in Iraq that aims to reduce the number of weapons in exchange for vocational training and job opportunities.

Finally, we would like to enhance our collaboration to empower youth for development.

The UNDP's Arab Human Development Report found that almost two-thirds of young voters in the Arab region recognized "quality education" and "better job opportunities" as the top two priorities for the Arab region.

To help achieve these goals, we would like to use a new initiative that offers future leaders opportunities to study in Japan, to learn about Japan's experiences of modernization at Japanese graduate schools in collaboration with universities throughout Japan.

We also plan to invite young leaders from the region to Japan early next year for the opportunity to learn about Japan's modernization and discuss how the power of younger generations can be applied to their reforms. We are excited to hear their ideas and visions, and to make use of them for our future collaboration.

At the Manama Dialogue last year, I expressed my unwavering determination to help achieve stability and security in the Middle East under the “Kono Four Principles.” Our efforts under these “Principles” include playing an active role as an honest facilitator of peace dialogues while also working to develop human capital.

There are still challenges to the region's stability, even after recent victories in the fight against terrorism and ISIL. A definitive victory can only come after reconstruction.

We must continue our collaboration to eliminate the root causes of instability and impediments of economic prosperity in conjunction with international efforts to address the immediate humanitarian and stabilization needs. I believe successful human capital development will play a critical role to this end.

I would like to conclude with the words of a prominent Meiji era educator. He wrote, “*National Independence must be obtained Through Personal Independence.*”

I believe this represents the spirit of the Meiji Restoration that we hope to share.

Thank you very much.