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における河野大臣スピーチ

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（第3セッション「Maritime Security in the Middle East」）

Doctor Chipman, honorable ministers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. I am Kono Taro. I am honored and grateful to be back here in Manama to talk with you today in my new capacity as Defense Minister of Japan.

I moved from Foreign Affairs Ministry to Defense this September, and I got much bigger budget, but much bigger headache as well. As I noted in my last two remarks delivered at this forum past two years, I firmly believe that the peace and stability of the Middle East region is directly linked to the peace and economic prosperity of the world, including that of Japan's; and there is a unique role that Japan can play to contribute to this region. This has been my conviction as I navigated Japan's diplomacy as the Foreign Minister for 770 days. Now, as Defense Minister, it remains to be my compass in guiding the direction of Japan's security-based engagement in this region.

The Middle East is a hub for global commerce and trade. This region is the world's largest producer and exporter of oil. And in this region are significant maritime choke points that are critically important, namely the Suez Canal, Strait of Hormuz, and Bab el Mandeb Strait. It goes without saying that international peace and prosperity depend on the maritime security of this region.

99.6% of Japan's international trade is delivered by maritime transportation. Reliance on maritime transportation of the Middle East is particularly notable when it comes to oil import. As such, it's no exaggeration to state that Japan enjoys stable economic activity, over 8,000 kilometers away from Manama, precisely because of the security of the Middle East region.

The challenges to maritime security in the Middle East have provided an opportunity for economically developed Japan to meet its responsibilities within the international community. For Japan, a stable supply of oil from the Middle East was one of the crucial elements that led to our rapid economic

growth after World War II. And it remains to this day, the foundation of our continued prosperity through international trade. We are acutely aware of the utmost importance of maintaining a stable maritime security in the Middle East that will continue to foster global economic growth and prosperity.

In 1991, Japan sent six vessels of its Maritime Self-Defense Force to the Gulf to conduct minesweeping operations alongside the naval forces of other countries. This operation was named “Operation Gulf Dawn” in anticipation of a new dawn of hope for the region after the Gulf War. This engagement was Japan’s very first overseas deployment since the establishment of the Japan Self-Defense Forces in 1954. Under this operation, Japan’s contingent dismantled a total of 34 mines without an incident. It made a significant contribution to the safety and security of this vitally important maritime location. The success of “Operation Gulf Dawn” brought about a change in the mindset of the Japanese people as to our responsibilities. It “awakened” the spirit of international cooperation that inspires nations to act in support of the international community and not in pursuit of self-interest.

Since then, the Japan Self-Defense Forces has continued to contribute to regional maritime security. Japan provided a decade of assistance to maritime interdiction operations against terrorism and the weapons transportation in the Indian Ocean. Japanese Commanders and Liaison Officers have been on duty in CTF151 Headquarters here in Bahrain. Japan also has taken part in the ongoing counter-piracy operation off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden for over a decade now. At this very moment, two Japanese patrol aircraft and a destroyer are on duty as part of the counter-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden. Relatedly, Japan Self-Defense Forces is forging broader and closer ties with this region through exercises such as “International Maritime Exercise” from 2012, defense equipment cooperation, person-to-person links between junior commissioned officers and other initiatives as well.

I trust the foregoing examples of Japan’s commitment to the Gulf and Indian Ocean demonstrate our intent and capability to remain committed to the maritime security and peace and stability of the Middle East. After all, the deployment of our defense assets and personnel to this region over the past two decades, in particular, has come at a time of increasing concern about security in Japan’s immediate vicinity. In other words, we recognize the ongoing importance of maritime security here in the Middle East, even in view

of pressing security challenges closer to home.

Japan has contributed to the maintenance of maritime security in the Middle East, as we take the view that an open and secure maritime order provides the basis for a stable and prosperous international community. There may have been changes in maritime affairs over many centuries, but freedom of navigation has always been, and should remain, a fundamental and universal principle. In order to ensure safe overflight, maritime passage and other activities permitted under international law, adherence to the rule of law at sea is essential.

With respect to the rule of law in a maritime context, I refer to Prime Minister Abe's 2014 Shangri-La Dialogue speech, in which he laid out "the three principles of the rule of law at sea". These three principles are that: (i) states shall make and clarify their claims based on international law; (ii) states shall not use force or coercion in trying to drive their claims; and (iii) states shall seek to settle disputes by peaceful means. With respect to the Middle East, it is critical that regional waterways and the maritime commons remain a global public good so as to ensure security and prosperity across the international community.

My final point today is to highlight how the foregoing is shaping Japan's engagement with the region in response to evolving security challenges. There have been incidents that cannot be overlooked when considering the maritime security of the Middle East. Japan is concerned about escalation of the tension in the region.

Japan has persistently made diplomatic efforts to help ease tensions and to bring stability to the Middle East. Prime Minister Abe and I, as Foreign Minister, visited Iran in June this year and met President Rouhani and Supreme Leader Khamenei. Japan will endeavor to make further diplomatic efforts.

Moreover, in an effort to reinforce our information gathering capabilities, Japan has started to consider how we can best utilize the assets of the Japan Self-Defense Forces as our independent efforts. Our aim is to contribute not only to ensure the safety of Japan-related ships, but also to secure the peace and stability of the Middle East region.

In conclusion, I'd like to refer to Japan's vision for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific." This vision is our guiding principles for international cooperation. In pursuing this vision, Japan will continue to strive for the security of the Indo-Pacific maritime order, and broader international order, based on the rule of law. It is my conviction that this vision will lead to an improvement in the security of this region, and also to international peace and stability. Thank you very much.