**Abe offers $2.5 billion aid for Mideast stability**

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The Associated Press

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe speaks during a joint meeting of the Japan-Egypt Business Council in Cairo on Saturday.

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The Japan News Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said in Cairo on Saturday that Japan will provide $2.5 billion to Middle Eastern nations in nonmilitary fields such as humanitarian assistance and infrastructure development for regional stability.

During a policy speech Abe made at a meeting of the Japan-Egypt Business Council, he stressed the necessity of seeking the middle ground amid the threat of the Islamic State and the rise of extremism such as seen in the Paris terror attacks.

Abe said he is now paying attention to the region’s proverb “the middle ground is the best,” adding that Japan and Middle Eastern nations share a common trait of “placing value on tradition and seeking the middle ground.”

Abe said the reason why he is paying attention to the proverb is his concern “over the expansion of extremism and wavering public order surrounding the Middle East.”

“The only way to nip violence in the bud is to stabilize people’s livelihoods and nurture the middle class, no matter how long it takes,” Abe said.

In particular, Abe said Japan will provide $360 million in yen loans to Egypt for the expansion of Borg El-Arab Airport, including a project to establish a power network.

Abe said Japan will assist refugees and internally displaced people in and around Iraq and Syria to curb the threat of the Islamic State militant group. The prime minister said a total of about $200 million will be provided to nations fighting against the Islamic State, including Turkey and Lebanon.

Abe said stability in the Middle East is the foundation for the peace and prosperity of the world, including Japan. “If terrorism and weapons of mass destruction are allowed to spread in the region, damage to the international community will be colossal.”

Japan is determined to devote its experience, wisdom and abilities to world peace under the principle of seeking to make a “proactive contribution to peace based on international cooperation,” Abe said.

“Please understand how much we care about the stabilization of the Middle East and the determination to make all-out efforts to meet the purpose,” Abe said.

Regarding Middle East peace efforts, Abe said he will ask Israel and Palestine to resume talks to advance a two-state solution. “Japan believes it will be able to recognize Palestine as a sovereign nation in the near future,” Abe said.

Abe will visit Palestine on Tuesday. There he will reveal plans to assist Palestine in fields such as medical care, building waterworks and helping refugees in the West Bank and Gaza.Speech

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