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Theme: Maritime Security in the 5th Fleet Area of Responsibility

The world depends heavily on maritime transport for shipping energy resources, and maritime security is thus an extremely important topic from this perspective as well. Petroleum demand is on the rise worldwide, and much of this demand is satisfied through procurement from the Middle East. The expansion of international trade has led to a variety of goods other than energy resources also moving between nations, and the volume of such goods transported by ship is expected to grow. With logistics management systems now in place that seek to keep inventory levels as low as possible in the interest of business efficiency, even a temporary disruption in the maritime transport responsible for conveying many goods could interrupt the flow of goods and adversely affect people's livelihoods.

The Gulf region of the Middle East for which we are responsible features three transport bottlenecks: the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Bab el Mandeb. The volume of traffic through the Strait of Hormuz stands head and shoulders above the other, with about 40% of the world's petroleum passing through this strait. There have been many reports of ships being subjected to terrorist attacks or piracy, with instances of the latter particularly prevalent in the past few years. The piracy initially confined primarily to the shores of Somalia has now expanded even to the coasts of India. Numerous countries and regions on their own or in partnership have been dispatching forces to maintain patrols and ensure the safety of maritime transport. Each joint task force has an established role and area of activity, and the participating countries are performing their duties within their stipulated scope.

Japan, too, has made conspicuous contributions to the activities in this region, and I would like to offer my thanks to the people of Japan and the members of its Self Defense Forces. The pirate attack on the *Adinet* in the Gulf of Aden on July 22, 2011 was resolved without problem and successfully concluded through the assistance of Japan's SDF. These are not activities that can be carried out by individual countries on their own, and the assistance and

cooperation of other countries is always needed. Japan has been engaged in a variety of assistance activities in the Middle East. Japan's contributions in the Middle East are extremely important – e.g., patrols of the Arabian Gulf by Japanese escort ships, refueling of other countries' vessels, participation in joint exercises, pursuit of friendly relations with Bahrain – and its presence is also essential to the execution of our own mission.

In the Middle East at present, the greatest caution needs to be exercised with respect to Iran. Iranian mines, submarines, and cruise missiles pose a major threat. Iran is also pushing ahead with the development of increasingly longer-range ballistic missiles. Additionally, attention must be paid to Iran's nuclear development program. Political instability is now on the rise in the Middle East, and a chain reaction of democratization movements has swept the region. The Middle East remains an important area for the rest of the world, and all countries concerned must continue working in close cooperation to ensure the stability and security of this region.