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Extraordinary Press Conference by Foreign Minister Taro Kono Saturday, April 14, 2018, 6:20 p.m. Front Entrance Hall, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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Opening Remarks

Mr. Taro Kono, Minister for Foreign Affairs: Japan's position is that we will never accept the use of chemical weapons, we believe that in the case that chemical weapons are used, the parties who used them must be punished. And it is extremely regrettable that recently the threshold for the use of chemical weapons has lowered, and chemical weapons are becoming weapons that are used. In this context, Japan is able to support the present determination of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France not to accept the proliferation of the use of chemical weapons, and understands these measures. The G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting will be held soon, so if circumstances permit, I would also like to attend that meeting to strongly express the position of Japan that the use of chemical weapons is totally unacceptable, and at the same time, I intend to assert in the G7 the position of Japan, in a robust manner, that a mechanism similar to the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) that can investigate the regular use of chemical weapons and identify users and the chemical weapons must be established urgently, and I will also clarify this position of Japan at the United Nations.

Question-and-Answer Session

Reporter: Is it acceptable to conclude that the "support for the determination" that you spoke about just now equals support for the attack on Syria?

Minister: It has been confirmed that Syria used chemical weapons previously, and possesses chemical weapons research and development capacity. Japan understands the present measures to degrade Syria's chemical weapons research and development capacity.

Reporter: What do you think about the legitimacy of the attack on Syria?

Minister: Japan is not a party to this matter, so Japan, which is not a party to this matter, is not in a position to state a legal assessment of the action.

Reporter: In relation to the present attack, do you have any evidence that the Assad regime used chemical weapons on this occasion?

Minister: Regarding the present use of chemical weapons, I believe that a variety of relevant facts will be discovered going forward, but it has been confirmed that the Assad regime used chemical weapons previously, and it is also clear that the Assad regime possesses this chemical weapons research and development capacity, so Japan understands the measures to degrade Syria's research and development capacity in order to prevent use and proliferation of chemical weapons going forward.

Reporter: Did Japan receive a notification in advance from the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, the countries that carried out the attack?

Minister: I always refrain from commenting on diplomatic exchanges, and will do the same this time.

Reporter: You spoke about the investigative mechanism of the OPCW, but on this occasion the action was taken at the stage before the

OPCW investigation actually starts, so what reasons do you have for understanding the attack itself on the basis that Syria has the capacity?

Minister: I proposed extension of the mandate of the JIM, but this proposal was rejected in the Security Council. Japan believes that it is necessary to establish a permanent organization that can identify not only the types of chemical weapons but also the users in the case that regular use of chemical weapons in this way is suspected. Regarding the measures to degrade this kind of research and development capacity of the Assad regime, the fact that the Assad regime has used chemical weapons previously has been confirmed internationally, so Japan understands those measures.

Reporter: Regarding the present attack, the United States has attacked on the pretext that the chemical weapons that were used this time were used by Syria. Now Japan has said as a general theory that the purpose of the attack was to reduce the research and development capacity of Syria. Does the Government of Japan say that the present chemical weapons were used by Syria?

Minister: Regarding that, I think that a variety of facts will be discovered going forward, but in any case it is a fact that Syria has used chemical weapons, and that it possesses chemical weapons research and development capacity, so Japan understands the measures to degrade this research and development capacity.

Reporter: You say you “support” the determination and “understand” the action so there is a difference in the strength of the words you are using. Why is this?

Minister: Japan takes the strong position that the use of chemical weapons is totally unacceptable. Of course I intend to share that position with all of the other countries so I think that it is natural for Japan to want to support that strong determination felt by the three countries of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France.

Reporter: Are you saying that your position is a little different from that of the United Kingdom, the United States, and France in that you do not support the action?

Minister: That is not what I mean. I think that there will be a variety of assessments and other activities regarding the measures going forward, but I want to understand the measures to degrade the research and development capacity.

Reporter: I think the confrontation between the three countries of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France and Russia will deepen going Reporterforward. Will Japan get caught in the middle in advance of the Japan-Russia Summit Meeting in May?

Minister: The position of Japan is that the use of chemical weapons is totally unacceptable. Regarding this, I believe that Russia has the same position on the use of chemical weapons.

Reporter: Do you think the present attack is also a restraint on North Korea, and sends the message that when military action should be taken it will be taken?

Minister: I believe that the present attack is a manifestation of the determination of the three countries regarding Syria’s chemical weapons.

Reporter: Regarding Russia, Russia is also criticizing this attack. Russia probably has the same position about the use of chemical weapons as a general theory, but will there be an impact on the Japan-Russia relations in that sense?

Minister: Russia has a variety of relations with Syria, so regarding that the position of Russia is probably different in the sense that it has those relations with Syria but I do not think there is a difference between the positions of Russia and Japan in terms of chemical weapons at least.

Reporter: Going forward, do you plan to hold telephone talks, etc. regarding this matter with the United States or any other countries?

Minister: I think that going forward a variety of matters could be considered, but I will refrain from commenting here.

Reporter: Regarding the United States, the prime minister is planning to visit the United States next week, and regarding Russia, as was noted earlier, the prime minister is planning to visit Russia and holding a variety of working-level meetings, including strategic dialogues, etc. next month. How do you intend to seek understanding of the position of Japan during these visits?

Minister: I will refrain from commenting on future matters.

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