

Ambassador Kusaka's Remarks

Strengthening Australia-Japan-U.S. Strategic Cooperation: Prospects and Challenges Monday 30th January 2017

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to all the participants from both within and outside of Australia who are taking part in this conference, and to Professor Medcalf and the ANU National Security College for all their effort in providing this platform. It allows us to gather and discuss the prospects and challenges in strengthening strategic cooperation between Japan, Australia, and the United States.

During the past 18 months our region has been eventful to say the least, and even more so globally. In late 2015, a new government was launched in Australia under the leadership of Prime Minister Turnbull. In the same month Prime Minister Abe's government passed the Legislation for Peace and Security, enabling Japan to take on a larger role in making a proactive contribution to peace in the international arena.

In 2016 we saw North Korea conducting two nuclear tests and more than 20 missile firings, which violate relevant UN Security Council resolutions and constitute a serious threat to our security.

And in our own neighbourhood, tensions in the South China Sea have grown, with much concern over large scale land-reclamation and artificial island-building and the ensuing militarisation of these islands. With an unpredictable and uncertain era setting in, Japan and Australia will need to take a conscious and concerted effort to strengthen our bilateral partnership as well as reinforcing active engagement with the U.S. and continuing to build upon recent developments in trilateral security cooperation, which have opened a new chapter in our security arrangements.

For the first time in three years, Japan, Australia and the U.S. held the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) at a ministerial level in the margins of the ASEAN Conference in Vientiane in July of 2016. This meeting was the 6th of its kind, and was attended by the Foreign Minister of Japan, Fumio Kishida, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, Julie Bishop and U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry.

This meeting produced a statement which reiterated the importance of upholding the rules-based maritime order, respect for freedom of navigation and overflight, as well as expressing serious concerns over maritime disputes in the South China Sea.

And in October of last year, senior defence officials from all three countries met in Hawaii, together with respective diplomatic officials for the 8th Trilateral Security and Defence Cooperation Forum. At this event, representatives from the Australian Department of Defence, the Japanese Ministry of Defence and the U.S. Department of Defence signed a Trilateral Information Sharing Agreement (TISA) to further strengthen trilateral defence cooperation.

In addition to these policy initiatives, there are also more opportunities for joint training between all three countries, which will increase our joint capability to address the challenges ahead.

As you are aware, Prime Minister Abe visited Sydney just over two weeks ago where he met with Prime Minister Turnbull to discuss a number of important topics, including furthering cooperation in the area of security. The prime ministers affirmed Japan and Australia's relationship remains relevant and important more than ever.

The two Prime Ministers also confirmed that their respective alliances with the U.S. are the cornerstones of Japan and Australia's peace and security, and underpin regional stability and prosperity.

It is extremely significant that through this visit where they spent hours together, the two Prime Ministers finally established a very close personal relationship, calling each other Shinzo and Malcolm.

Despite the changing and fluid political landscape, Japan and Australia will continue to build on their 'special strategic partnership' and work together proactively on the priority areas of maritime security in the Indo-Pacific with other like-minded countries to maintain the rules-based international order and support a peaceful and stable region.

In this context, Australia welcomed Japan's focus on greater regional engagement under Japan's recently promoted 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy', which views the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific as being connected and peace and stability of the two oceans

are quite important.

In pursuing deeper defence cooperation, a new Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) was signed by Ambassador Miller and myself as the two Prime Ministers looked on to further facilitate mutual logistical support, including ammunition between the Australian Defence Force and the Japan Self-Defense Forces. This agreement symbolises the commitment our two countries share in bringing our security cooperation closer in the years ahead.

We may not have anticipated such major developments that are occurring in the global political landscape only a year ago, so we should not be surprised if equally seismic events await us in 2017. Our two countries, Japan and Australia are the bedrock for peace and stability in the region, and being the steady force in the region is becoming all the more important.

It remains my strong view that the Japan-Australia-U.S. triangle is the key to the future of peace and stability in our neighbourhood. There is no room for complacency, and I look forward to talking with you vigorously over the next two days to exchange views frankly and find a good path forward for our common future.

Thank you.