

News from under the Southern Cross - Edition 19.

“2 + 2”

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The world of diplomacy has a vast array of specialized terminology. In English the word ‘Gobbledygook’ is used to make light of such bureaucratic language, thus revealing that this issue is not limited to Japanese diplomacy. Amid the many words that only those who use them understand (or feign to understand), “2 + 2” might be regarded as relatively straightforward.

1. The Japan-Australia “2 + 2”

“2+2” refers to the “Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations”. The foreign ministers and defence ministers of Japan and Australia get together and conduct a meeting. The history of the Japan-Australia “2 + 2” commenced in 2007, following on from a similar arrangement between Japan and the United States. The Japan-Australia “2 + 2” meeting held on the 9th of this month marked the ninth such consultation.

In addition to Australia and the United States, Japan also conducts “2 + 2” consultations with India, Indonesia, the UK, France, Germany, and Russia. As the consultation includes not only the foreign minister, but also the defence minister, both sides are able to broadly and strategically discuss any of their shared security concerns thereby facilitating and strengthening co-operation between the countries.



The Japan-Australia “2 + 2” Ministerial Consultation (Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

2. Historic Content

The reason that I have raised such a serious topic in this edition of 'News from under the Southern Cross' is because, even from my perspective, the recent consultation bore extraordinarily large fruit. Over my long career as a diplomat I have seen many 'formulaic' documents, but every now and then I find one that makes me realise how far we have come. The joint statement from the recent consultation was one such document (and can be read [here](#)), so what follows is my attempt to analyze it while intermingling my own judgments and perspectives.

The fact that the content of this fruitful joint statement was the result of a videoconference (rather than a face-to-face meeting) speaks volumes about the high degree of maturity in the Japan-Australia relationship.

3. Japan-Australia relations in the Indo-Pacific

Such statements are drafted together by Japan and Australia, and so naturally they emphasize co-operation between both countries. However this statement placed co-operation in the Indo-Pacific at the head of the document. Which is to say, it offered up a broader perspective on issues beyond those that directly affect Japan and Australia.

In sum, it emphasised the importance of US engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, the need for cooperation with ASEAN countries and Pacific Island nations, and welcomed the growth in interest and engagement from the EU and European nations in the region.

What it also did was bring to the fore a posture whereby Japan and Australia will play an active role, both through bilateral co-operation and via frameworks such as the Quad, to realise a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific".

4. "Australia is not alone"

The next major point from the joint statement was the strong message to Australia, which is currently undergoing tremendous difficulties in its relationship with one of its trading partners. To summarise, the message stated "We commit to opposing coercion and destabilising behaviour by economic means, which undermines the rules-based international system" and "We express

concern over coercive economic practices and will work with partners to address economic challenges to support a free, open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific”.

It was enormously significant that a document stemming from a high level dialogue like the 2 + 2 confirmed that “Australia is not alone”.

5. Co-operation in the East China Sea and South China Sea

Continuing attempts to unilaterally change the status quo through force or coercion have been seen in both the South China Sea and the East China Sea. However, in the South China Sea Japan-Australia co-operation was centered around joint patrols and exercises in order to maintain freedom of navigation and overflight. Whereas in the East China Sea, most of our activities were focused on vigilance and surveillance aimed at preventing illegal ship-to-ship transfers by North Korean vessels in violation of UN Security Council resolutions.

In response to this, the recent joint statement emphasised the necessity and importance of Japan-Australia co-operation, both in the South China Sea and in the East China Sea. In the background there is also deep concern within the international community, not only among Japan and Australia but the countries of the Indo-Pacific, as well as the US and EU, about the peace and security of the Taiwan Strait.

6. Specific, practical co-operation

Together with all the major points outlined above, one of the most unique characteristics of the current statement is the profound agreement for specific, practical co-operation on the ground.

It talks about increasing inter-operability between the Japan Self Defence Force and the Australian Defence Force. In this context, what this refers to is high-level exercises such as air-to-air refueling.



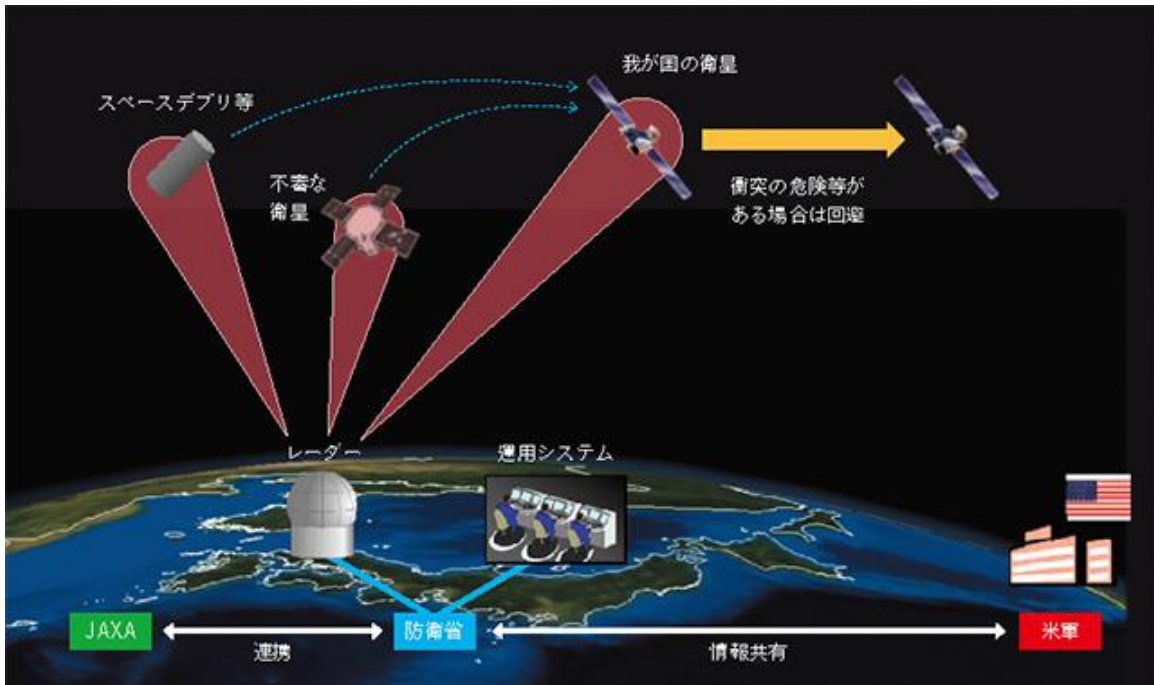
Air-to-air refueling by a JASDF KC-767 (Source: Ministry of Defence)

The statement also clearly stipulates that the ADF is included under Article 95-2 of the Self Defence Force Law concerning “asset protection”. We have entered an age in which the SDF will protect Australian defence assets such as naval vessels in response to requests to do so when all legal requirements are satisfied.



Joint exercise between the JMSDF and RAN in the South China Sea (Source: Ministry of Defence)

Another noticeable addition was Space Situational Awareness (SSA). The Self Defence Force is working towards completion of an SSA system by the end of JFY 2022, and so co-operation on information sharing with the ADF in this field has entered the picture. I am sure some of you will recall that experts have pointed out the importance of communications intelligence collected on the Australian continent since the Cold War period.



Strengthening the capabilities of the JASDF in the space arena (Source: Ministry of Defence)

7. A final word

We've reached a stage which elicits strong emotions on "just how far we have come" for many who have been involved in security co-operation between Japan and Australia over the years.

In fact, the other day, while exchanging views with members of the Australian Parliament whom I had invited to my Residence, I said the following:

"While it is true that Japan and Australia experienced an unfortunate period during the Second World War when we clashed with one another, taking a longer view, we fought on the same side during the First World War. For example, the Japanese battle cruiser 'Ibuki' provided protection to Australian soldiers dispatched from the Australian continent and across the Indian Ocean while they were at sea. Following the Second World War, we fought alongside one another for many years during the Cold War. And then in Iraq, we co-operated with one another (in peace-keeping duties)".



The Battle Cruiser 'Ibuki' (Source: Ministry of Defence)

We are in an age in which the true value of co-operation is increasingly being tested. Japan and Australia, while geographically distant from one another, are connected via the oceans of the Indo-Pacific. I fully intend to build an even-closer co-operative relationship between our countries while recognising the sacrifices and dedication of our forebears.

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