

News From Under the Southern Cross - Edition 48.

Deepening Security Cooperation

22 December

(The original in Japanese was published on 9 December)

It's already December. Nearly a year has passed since I took up my post in Canberra. Something that has left an impression on me during that time has been the recent discussions between Japan and Australia exploring the topic of security, and the deepening of cooperation between both countries on this front.

1. Taiwan

Cast your mind back to June. The “2+2” ministerial consultation between Japan and Australia (so named because it is attended by the foreign and defence ministers of both countries) took place for the ninth time. However, this marked the first time that the issue of Taiwan had been referred to in a joint statement released after the meeting.

“We underscore the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encourage the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues.”



The 9th Japan-Australia Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations (2+2) (Source: Ministry of Defence)

2. The South China Sea, The East China Sea

The differences in Australia's approach to the South China Sea and the East China Sea have long been pointed out among experts who follow Australia's national security policies.

On the one hand, in the South China Sea, which is geographically closer to Australia, the intensification of disputes surrounding maritime interests between stakeholder nations, as well as China's rapid militarisation of the region, have made it the focal point for concern for the international community. In response, the Australian Government has not only actively released statements about this situation, but has also played a major role in our endeavour to reinforce the rule of law in the region, including ensuring that freedom of navigation and overflight are observed through joint exercises and patrols with Japan and the US.

On the other hand, despite attempts in the East China Sea to change the status quo in a similar manner (to those in the South China Sea), because of its geographical remoteness from Australia, there has been less interest and engagement compared with the South China Sea.

It has been pointed out that in regard to Australia's actions concerning challenges in the South China Sea, Australia's responses have been led by a 'fear of abandonment' which has long underpinned its overall external policy, while in the East China Sea its policy has been characterised by a 'fear of entanglement'.

Yet as the security environment surrounding the Senkaku Islands and the Taiwan Strait grows ever more severe year after year, Australia has also shown a stronger degree of interest in this region, and has deepened its engagement with it.

3. Mention made of the Senkaku Islands

Moreover, in Defence Minister Peter Dutton's recent speech at the National Press Club, he stated that "If Taiwan is taken, surely the Senkakus are next". This was the first time that an Australian defence minister had made such a remark, garnering a lot of interest because of its historical significance. It is certainly something to which Japan's media ought to be paying attention.

Speaking of the Senkaku Islands, anybody that has studied international law knows and accepts that the islands are clearly an integral part of Japanese territory given the following two points;

- (1) Despite the long absence of any objections to the clear and unequivocal designation of the Senkaku Islands as Japanese territory since 1895, it was only in 1971, after the potential existence of oil and gas reserves in the seabed of the surrounding region started to attract international interest, that China first raised its objections.
- (2) After WWII, despite the US military using Kuba-jima and Taisho-jima, both of which are part of the Senkaku Islands, as shooting and bombing ranges, no objections to this activity

were raised by China.

Minister Dutton showed profound insight when he expounded the strategic importance of the Senkaku Islands to the regional security environment. As is obvious through any quick glance at a map, the Senkaku Islands lie in one corner of the shortest route to advance from the Chinese mainland, across the East China Sea, and past between Okinawa's main island and Miyakojima into the western Pacific Ocean. Its strategic importance is a view shared among leading experts not only in Japan and the US, but also in Australia.



Map of the East China Sea. The Senkaku Islands are indicated by the red line. Source: This map is a reproduction compiled from GSI maps published by the Geospatial Information Authority of Japan

4. From land, sea, and air, to cyber and space

The security space that Japan and Australia share is not limited to oceans, such as the South and East China Seas. Nor is it limited to land, where we sweat together during 'Exercise Southern Jackaroo'. Neither is it limited to airspace when we fly side by side as in the case of 'Exercise Bushido Guardian'. Both cyber and outer space are also areas where our cooperation actively takes place.

On that note, last week I gave a speech at a space symposium to which I had been invited, where I emphasised the importance of cooperation in space between Japan and Australia ([the speech](#), and [a summary of the main points of the speech](#), can be read here).



Giving my speech at the Southern Space Symposium

5. Exchanging views with the ADF senior leadership

Members of the Japanese and Australian defence forces cooperate closely with one another on a daily basis. Just the other day the Australian Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Rick Burr, paid a visit to Japan.

Against this background, I invited top leaders of the ADF and its three service arms, including Chief of the Defence Force General Angus Campbell, to my Residence last week where we had an in-depth exchange of views. From the point of view of maintaining peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region, the range of topics for discussion proved inexhaustible, starting with the state of affairs in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia.



With CDF Campbell at my Residence

6. Towards future-oriented cooperation

To date, the ferocious battles that Australian troops fought against the Japanese military on the Kokoda Track in New Guinea during the Second World War are remembered by members of Australia's military, thus transcending the generations. If you visit the War Memorial in Canberra, there is a special exhibition which re-creates the atmosphere of these fierce battles.

At the same time, close to this exhibit is another diorama that depicts the Imperial Japanese Navy cruiser "Ibuki", providing escort protection for the ANZACs as they crossed the Indian Ocean on their way to the theatres of the Middle East and Europe during the First World War.

Taking a bird's eye view of our long history, despite the unfortunate period of the Second World War, one cannot fail to notice Japan and Australia's long history of cooperation, toiling for common causes side by side, as manifested in our joint endeavours during the First World War, and then, in the post-1945 era. The foundations that the sacrifices and dedication of both sides built through our shared history are the basis for the mutual trust we enjoy today.

As the security environment of the Indo-Pacific annually grows ever more severe, I am acutely aware that now is the time for Japan and Australia to work together in response to a “clear and present danger”. Security cooperation between us thus grows ever more vital.

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