

News from under the Southern Cross - Edition 49: The Five Eyes

23 December

Last week, I welcomed to my official-Residence the head of Australia's intelligence agencies, Office of National Intelligence (ONI) Director-General, Mr Andrew Shearer and the week before Director-General of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS), Mr Paul Symon. The fruitful discussions inspired me to use this edition to talk about intelligence cooperation.



The focal point for Australia's intelligence community, ONI Director-General Shearer

1. Japan-Australia intelligence cooperation

One of the remarkable areas of progress between Japan and Australia in recent years has been in intelligence cooperation. This is a natural development given that we share such fundamental values and principles as democracy, the rule of law, respect for basic human rights and a market economy, as well as our goal of realising a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific', including in the face of challenges in cooperation in the South China Sea and the East China Sea.

In my previous role as Director-General of the Intelligence and Analysis Service, the bureau responsible for intelligence matters within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, one of the countries with which I struck the closest cooperative relationship was Australia. Against this background, among successive Japanese ambassadors to Australia, you occasionally come across those with intelligence experience Ambassadors such as KURODA Mizuo, YANAGIYA Kensuke, SATO Yukio, and KOJIMA Takaaki.

2. Heart-warming greetings

Actually, the most heart-warming greetings I received upon my arrival in Canberra came from members of the intelligence community, starting with Director-Generals Shearer and Symon.



ASIS Director-General Symon, responsible for the collection of Australia's foreign intelligence

Another person to greet me warmly was Director-General Mike Burgess, head of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) which is responsible for Australia's domestic counter-intelligence. I met him through an introduction courtesy of my good friend OTSUKA Umio, former Director of Japan's Defense Intelligence Headquarters (who is currently serving as Japan's Ambassador to Djibouti).

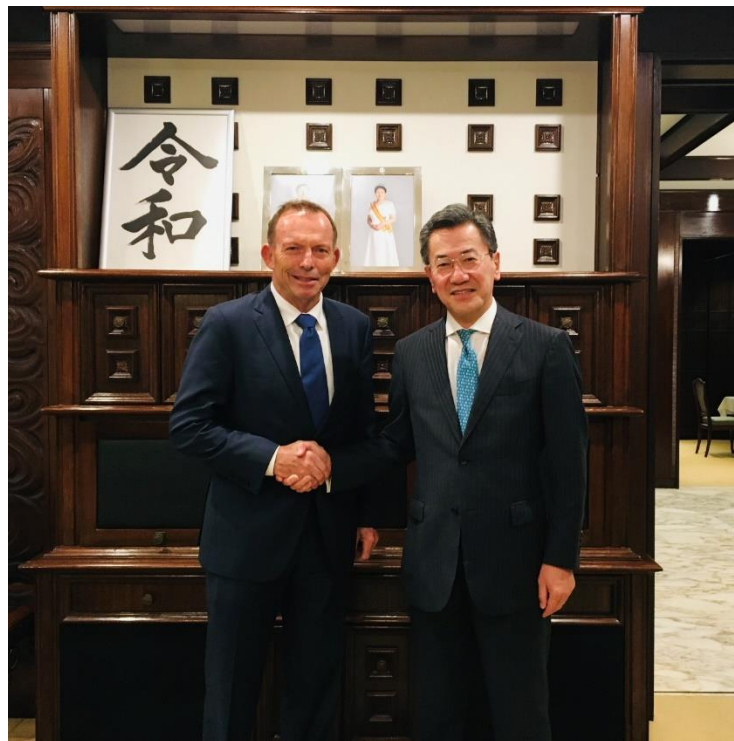
Director-General Burgess showed me a great deal of care and attention not only by inviting me in March to become the first Japanese Ambassador to attend his address to members of the Australian Government and media on Australia within the current intelligence environment, but also going so far as to introduce me in front of everyone.

I suppose one thing we all have in common is a shared appreciation of whisky. I have been very impressed by the Tasmanian whisky that the Directors-Generals brought with them. As for my Australian friends, they all extraordinarily appreciate renowned Japanese whisky such as "Hibiki" and "Yamazaki". Now that's what you call a true mutual exchange of information!

3. Join the Five Eyes?

At the moment, one question I am frequently asked in interviews and after giving speeches is “will Japan join the ‘Five Eyes’, the intelligence-sharing network built by Australia, the US, UK, Canada, and New Zealand?”

There is no shortage of experts who have publicly advocated that Japan be admitted to the group to form the ‘Six Eyes’”, including former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott and recent Japan Foreign Minister’s Award recipient, Executive-Director of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), Peter Jennings.



Former Prime Minister Tony Abbott,
one of the advocates for Japan’s entry into the Five Eyes network

Given the fundamental values and strategic interests that Japan and Australia share, it is not difficult to imagine that Japan’s in-depth knowledge and wealth of historical experience in dealing with the most pressing issues in the Indo-Pacific region would be sought after. When I was Director-General of the Intelligence and Analysis Service, I received first-hand knowledge of just how highly Western agencies regard Japan’s situational analysis of the region.

4. Japan has some homework to do

At the same time, whenever I receive a question or comment concerning the 'Five Eyes' and so forth, I respond by saying "It's an honour to hear such appreciation for Japan's capabilities", but add "That said, there's still more work Japan needs to do".

But what does this actually mean?

It means that Japan still has homework to do, be it establishing organisations, developing human resources, or making legislative arrangements.

For example, if undertaking intelligence cooperation with Australia's ASIS, the US CIA, or the UK's MI6, an equivalent counterpart organisation is indispensable. This then requires the establishment of a foreign intelligence agency, as they are commonly known. A good precedent for this was the creation in Japan of the National Security Secretariat (the NSS, which operates under the NSC – National Security Council) as a counterpart to the US NSC in the White House. This led to a far deeper level of communication between Japan and the US compared with that which existed beforehand.

So what these foreign agencies are really trying to say is "hurry up and make a counterpart organisation for us".

5. HR and legislative arrangements

Of course, it is not simply a case of 'build it and they will come'. You will need people to support the agency's activities.

When I was posted to London, an acquaintance of mine formerly working as the head of the UK intelligence community said to the following effect:

"Intelligence officers are neither a diplomat nor a policeman. While possessing a shrewd, discerning eye that takes an overall view of the international situation, they lead an anonymous existence devoid of any desire for fame, devoted to the task at hand, and willing to sacrifice their own lives. They take state secrets to the grave with them. It's a matter of pride for that lot."

Every professional working in the field of intelligence knows that legislative arrangements such as secrecy laws aimed not just at government but also members of the legislative branch, and strict anti-espionage laws are essential for them to be able to exchange information in a trusted manner.



In Japan, the establishment of a foreign intelligence agency, development of related human resources, and legislative arrangements, are all becoming urgent matters

6. Building individual blocks of cooperation

Japan is making steady progress in the field of national security to tackle complex issues such as changing the interpretation of the Constitution in relation to the right to collective self-defence. I personally do not believe that the establishment of intelligence agencies or the development of related human resources and legislative arrangements are insurmountable tasks. In fact, effort continues to be made on all fronts to this end.

The real nature of the challenge that Japan faces is not whether or not we should join the Five Eyes. It is a question of how Japan, directly confronted by North Korea's abductions and nuclear and missile development programs, and the various challenges posed by the rise of China including worsening tension in the area surrounding the Senkaku Islands and the politicalisation of history will take the initiative to strengthen its intelligence capabilities to preserve its peace and prosperity.

While keeping the big picture and such goals in mind, as Japan's Ambassador to Australia, I will continue to build up concrete blocks of cooperation, one step at a time.

YAMAGAMI Shingo