

Remarks by His Excellency Ambassador YAMAGAMI Shingo to the Japan Self-Defense Forces Day Dinner, Wednesday 30 November 2022

1. Introduction

General Angus Campbell

Mr Greg Moriarty

Lieutenant General Greg Bilton

Vice Admiral Mark Hammond

Lieutenant General Simon Stuart

Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston

Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin

Former Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Dibb

Former Chairman of the Institute for Regional Security Peter Nicholson

Former ASPI Executive Director Peter Jennings

Former National President of the RSL Major General Peter Phillips

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

- It is a great honour and an enormous pleasure to invite you to the Japanese Ambassador's Residence this evening.
- Coming from a military family, and with my history of working as Deputy Chief of Police in Ibaraki Prefecture, I can say I feel most at home when surrounded by uniforms!
- We gather here tonight to celebrate both the formation of the Japan Self-Defense Forces and the defence relationship between our respective forces.
- When the history of this relationship is written in the years to come, 2022 will without doubt be marked as a watershed moment in the evolution of our defence ties and bilateral security interests.

2. The Path to Reconciliation

- The path we have walked together has been long, and it has taken many years of patient, diligent effort to create the kind of defence partnership that we share today.
- For two nations whose military engagement spans more than a century, noting that the Japanese Imperial Navy Cruiser 'Ibuki' accompanied the Anzac fleet from Albany to Egypt in 1915, the ebb and flow of time proved a greater obstacle than could ever be imagined.
- It was not that long ago that any prospect of the SDF and ADF working in close cooperation would have been dismissed as unrealistic and, dare I say it, unwelcome.
- With memories of the war still strong in the public mind, the appetite for building ties with a former foe was weak and presented seemingly insurmountable hurdles.
- I can recall one former Australian Defence minister paraphrasing American Civil War General Phillip Sheridan in describing the older generation's perceptions of the Japanese.
- This is why I believe we owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the actions of a great many individuals, in having the foresight to transcend old grievances and extend the hand of friendship.
- They recognised that little would be gained by remaining mired in the past and so set us on the path towards reconciliation, based upon mutual respect and tolerance.
- The culmination of those efforts came in 2018 with the historic visit of the late ABE Shinzo to Darwin.
- The laying of wreathes by the Prime Ministers of Japan and Australia at the cenotaph there signified the closing of one era and the beginning of another – one of cooperation, consultation, and conviviality.
- It signified reconciliation achieved - for all time.

3. The Transformation in Japan's Defence Mindset

- The ability to reach reconciliation and create lasting bonds with a former foe is exemplary in a region where historical memory is often used for political gain.
- It is a rare and unique achievement, almost unknown in the long annals of human conflict.
- It is imbued with great significance, as it forms the foundation of a friendship that has brought us together to face the challenges that afflict our region and our world.
- The upgraded defence relationship forged between Japan and Australia is a testament to a transformation in mindset both here and in Japan.
- For many decades, Japan was content with its pacifist stance – it was a point of pride for some past Japanese ambassadors, not me of course (!), to declare that the SDF had never fired a shot in a conflict.
- The SDF was regarded with a degree of suspicion by some, and SDF personnel were discouraged from wearing their uniform to the Prime Minister's Office in Tokyo.
- Yet as this century has progressed it has become increasingly obvious to the Japanese populace that this situation cannot continue – not with the security environment in East Asia growing more severe, coupled with public recognition of the superb performance of the SDF responding to natural disasters in Japan and UN peace keeping operations abroad over the decades.
- The events in Ukraine and across the Taiwan Strait this year have only served to galvanize in Japan's population a renewed awareness of the need for deterrence and a willingness to protect what you have with whatever means available to you.
- That transformation in mindset is already becoming manifest in public discussions on the acquisition of counter-strike capabilities, and a pledge by the ruling LDP to increase defence spending over the next 5 years while taking into consideration the 2% target rate per GDP of NATO member countries.

4. The elimination of the line separating the South China Sea with the East China Sea

- As Japan continues to undergo a transformation in societal attitudes to defence, a similar and no less significant transformation in thinking can be discerned in Australia's approach to the South China Sea and East China Sea.
- For many years during my long career in the foreign service, my interaction with Australian diplomats, always the very epitomé of decorum, would often end in disagreement on the strategic importance of the East China Sea.
- For Australia, its attention was seemingly focused on the South China Sea and a 'fear of abandonment' as opposed to the East China Sea and a 'fear of entanglement'.
- An invisible line seemed to divide the two seas – never to be crossed and delineating where Australia's interests ended and those of other nations began.
- Yet events over the past decade have served to remove that line entirely, with recognition here that contingencies in the East China Sea can impact on Australia's trade, investment and security as assuredly as those in the South China Sea.
- Perhaps the most persuasive evidence of this heightened awareness among the Australian population was the poll released by the United States Studies Centre last month.
- 46% of Australian respondents support sending military forces to defend Taiwan if attacked by China, compared with one-third of all American and Japanese respondents.
- That is a remarkable statistic, and speaks volumes about the attention Australians pay to regional developments and the need to uphold the rules-based order therein.

5. Democracy at work throughout the region

- With a changed dynamic at work in the region, it comes as a surprise to no one that Japan and Australia sought to level-up our defence relationship through the signing by our two Prime Ministers of the epoch-making Updated Joint Declaration on

Security Cooperation last month.

- What it signifies is a new dimension in our defence ties.
- It signifies, as expressed by Prime Minister Albanese “the responsibility we share for security in our region and towards one another”.
- For the sake of peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, it is incumbent upon us all to unite.
- Unity is a factor that Japan, Australia, the US and like-minded partners excel and upon which our friends can assuredly rely.

5. Conclusion

- So it is to you, the leaders of the Australian Defence Force and the Department of Defence, its advisors, confidants, and occasional critics (!) that I offer the gratitude of the Government of Japan and its people for your assistance, advice, counsel and congeniality.
- We are, to use a good Aussie phrase, very bloody lucky to have you as a mate.
 - So here’s to the Self-Defense Forces and the ADF, for together we strive to protect, preserve, and promote our invaluable peace and security for now and for the generations to come.

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