

**Opening Remarks by His Excellency Ambassador YAMAGAMI Shingo
to the Perth USAsia Centre Japan Symposium 2023
University of Western Australia Tuesday 28 March 2023**

1. Introduction

The Honourable Kim Beazley,
The Honourable Richard Court,
Ambassador Justin Hayhurst,
Professor Gordon Flake,
Dr Mike Green,
Dr Lynn Kuok,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for that introduction, Gordon. I'll try my very best to live up to what you just said!

I should commence my remarks by first thanking the Perth USAsia Centre for the opportunity to address you all this morning here in the lovely campus of the University of Western Australia.

It is indeed a great pleasure to once more be out in the West. Despite the state emblem featuring a black swan, it comes as no surprise to me to be so warmly welcomed by you all!

This is actually my second trip to Perth in the space of three months – what is that saying about distance and hearts?

In January Kaoru and I travelled here on the Indian-Pacific, one of the world's great railway journeys and a fantastic way to see Australia in all of its glory.

It only occurred to me afterwards that perhaps I should have strapped a GoPro to the front of the train and filmed a new SBS series titled "Shingo's Slow TV".

This visit marks the sixth time that I have been over to the West since taking up my ambassadorial duties.

I've been up as far as Broome, where in one of my toughest missions, I successfully managed to dissuade Kaoru from clearing out the jewelry boutiques of their pearl supplies!

Without doubt, WA is a state whose grand ambitions match its size. It is no exaggeration on my part to say that you transcend the conventional to create the remarkable.

The shire of Sandstone is 32,000 squared kilometers, with a total population of 109. The Kimberley region is 12% larger than the entire land mass of Japan.

You are also a very literal state – Bridgetown is exactly as advertised. The Great Sandy Desert is all of those things. Useless Loop seems a bit harsh, however.

We're in a city with the most self-made millionaires per capita, in a state blessed with mineral and agricultural wealth from one end to the other, attracting all those with the resourcefulness and tenacity of a Gibson Desert emu.

Just take a look at Richard for example – he's a human dynamo, made more so by his use of a Panasonic E-bike.

WA, and Perth in particular, capture the world's attention – you got it from John Glenn and you've certainly got it from All Nippon Airways, who will commence flights from Perth to Narita from October this year, thereby bringing WA and Japan closer together once again.

What WA presents is a perfect symbiosis of enterprise and ingenuity, and that doesn't only apply to Richard and his E-bike. In other words, WA puts the 'wa' in successful partnerships (as yes, WA Industry is free to use that one if it likes).

This fact alone was recognized by Japanese businesses over 60 years ago, and since then investment from Japan has poured into WA, helping to develop the state and its infrastructure and provide Japan with the mineral and energy supplies to match its needs.

This cooperation has come to define the Japan-Australia relationship, a relationship that has never been better. It has also provided a firm foundation to move ahead.

This is why I have always made time for my friends from WA, as Gordon can well-attest. From Gina Rinehart through to Melanie Brock, my door is always open to WA to share a good Yanchep steak and Margaret River wine and discuss our mutual relationship.

2. Creating a secure future

That brings me to the crux of my remarks today – how Japan and Australia are combining our strengths to create a secure future.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a given that we are living through one of the most contested times in recent history. Russia's egregious invasion of Ukraine provides a sobering lesson about the importance of preserving the rule of law against powers that seek to overthrow or undermine it.

Our own region, the Indo-Pacific, is now the powerhouse of the world economy, providing much of the material and human ingenuity necessary to further civilization as we know it.

At the same time, it is a region, where challenges to the rules-based order have threatened stability and raised old shibboleths that many had thought dead and buried.

That point was emphasized by Prime Minister KISHIDA in his Shangri-La speech last year when he warned that the Ukraine of today might become East Asia of tomorrow.

This region is also prone to some of the worst effects of climate change. I did want to take this opportunity to send my thoughts to those in the Kimberley still recovering from the January floods. I know they've been through a lot and it's only March.

It was in recognition of the challenging circumstances of our times that Prime Ministers KISHIDA and Albanese met here in Perth just over six months ago and signed the updated Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation.

Much like Eliza down at Crawley Edge Boat Shed, the changing state of the region demanded a change of focus. To that end Japan and Australia made the historic step of agreeing to consult on contingencies that might affect our strategic interests and sovereignty, making us 'allies in all but name'.

When it comes to securing critical minerals and energy supply, particularly future energy supply, we are already ahead of the curve.

The McGowan government signed an MOU with JOGMEC last December, and also with the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) in January to promote the development of emerging industries here in WA, particularly those related to hydrogen, ammonia, low emission technology and decarbonisation. Financing for the future, to give it catchy tag-line.

Premier McGowan himself visited Japan earlier this year, where he reiterated the message that hydrogen and LNG will remain an important part of the energy transition – to go green, you first have to go blue.

The Browse LNG project will make a significant contribution to stable supply and energy transition not only in Japan, but also in other Asian countries undergoing remarkable economic growth.

Lynas Rare Earths also signed an agreement last year with JOGMEC and Sojitz Corporation to increase exploration around the Mt Weld site for new carbonatite mineral deposits, itself regarded as a significant development for the global rare earths industry.

Australia has also been the testing ground for NEC's quantum computing applications in its cooperation with the Department of Defence developing technology to optimize the use of autonomous vehicles for resupply missions. This is the first time such technology has been used outside of Japan.

The willingness by which Japanese and Australian companies have combined their talents to explore new opportunities in technological innovation and material supply bodes very well for our security future.

As WA's own Defence Industries Strategic Plan states "the most exciting opportunities for Western Australia will come through interstate or international partnerships".

I believe that sentiment is shared throughout Australia and is certainly driving greater Japanese investment in Australia's tech sectors.

On that note, my trip out to the Austal shipyard at Henderson was all the proof I needed that the prospects for Japanese defence tech cooperation with Australia are very bright indeed.

3. Trust and Concerns

Ladies and gentlemen, unlike Gnomesville at Wellington Mill it is no mystery as to what has led to the creation of our close strategic partnership of today. It is one word – trust.

Trust is not something given lightly – it relies on deep seated faith that your interests will be looked after and that when all is said and done your mates will have your back for whatever lies ahead.

You will have read in the media over recent months Japanese commentaries regarding the coal and gas industries at the state and federal level.

These commentaries echo the concerns of Japanese businesses.

Japanese businesses are paying attention to the possible impact that these developments could have on the investment environment in Australia, as well as on the reliability of resource and energy supply from Australia to Japan.

When I say Japanese businesses, I am not talking just about those operating here. I am told that the boardrooms of their headquarters in Japan are increasingly paying attention to the situation in Australia, hoping that this will not extend to sovereign risk.

The question boils down to the robustness of mutual trust.

Let me touch upon another issue related to mutual trust. I want to talk about what some people call the narrowing of the language space in some quarters of Australia.

Living in democracies such as Australia and Japan, whose diplomacy must be conducted with strong public support, the importance of engaging in public diplomacy cannot be emphasized enough.

Public support, founded on candid communication, is what makes mutual trust stronger.

In other words, this is what forms the bonds of our partnership.

Ambassadors ought not to shy away from requests for media interviews or public speeches in order to share their countries' perspectives on important issues of mutual interest. This could also include the conveying of industry voices given Japan's long-running close economic bonds with Australia, as I mentioned before.

Nevertheless, as you may know, there have been a few yet somewhat loud and unfairly critical media commentaries regarding the public relations of the Embassy and myself. Many others have been quick to point out that the narrowing of the language space is not in the interests of our partnership, a view with which I happen to agree.

This inclination towards self-censorship also has some resonance with what my good friend and aficionado of Hikibi whisky, the Director-General of ASIO Mike Burgess, recently stated regarding the pressure that he has felt in carrying out his duties cracking down on foreign interference and espionage.

Mutual trust, that has underpinned our partnership for decades, cannot be maintained through reticence. I am convinced that our two countries' partnership will go from strength to strength through effective and robust communication, public diplomacy and intellectual exchange.

In this task the role of think-tanks will be crucial. I am especially grateful for the key role that Perth USAsia Centre has played in forging candid conversations between experts and policy makers of Japan, Australia, and the United States, along with other like-minded countries including India. So a big arigatou to you, Gordon!

4. Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, this is why we have taken the steps that have led to our special strategic partnership.

Its ground-breaking nature has set the standard for what other defence relationships may come as we tackle the challenges before us.

Whatever the future may hold, the Japan-Australia relationship, whether it be in technical, industrial, digital or logistical cooperation, will go a long way to ensuring that our security remains, in the immortal words of Dennis Cometti, "centimetre perfect".

Thank you very much.

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