

Australia deserves permanent seat at G7 table: Japanese envoy

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Australia should become a permanent member of the G7 bloc of nations as the locus of economic and strategic power shifts to Asia, Japan's outgoing and outspoken ambassador to Australia says.

In an interview marking the end of his posting [<https://www.afr.com/world/asia/japan-s-wolf-warrior-ambassador-to-leave-20230219-p5clp4>], Shingo Yamagami agreed Australia had become Japan's second most important defence partner, amid a rapidly deteriorating security environment.



Japan's outgoing ambassador to Australia, Shingo Yamagami, wasn't afraid to ruffle feathers. **Alex Ellinghausen**

Mr Yamagami, who finished his tenure on ambassador on Friday, said there was much greater awareness in Australia of the security challenge posed by China that went beyond militarisation of the South China Sea, which historically has been a big focus of domestic defence planning.

“All in all, I would say that Japan and Australia have become allies in all but name,” Mr Yamagami said.

“In the older times, there used to be a psychological dividing line between the South China Sea and the East China Sea. But now I would say irrespective of political positions, the overwhelming number of people involved in policymaking would agree that what is going to transpire in the East China Sea, especially across the Taiwan Strait, is a matter of serious concern to the national interest of Australia as well.

“There is no denying that the security situation in the Indo-Pacific region, especially in East Asia, has become more severe and worse.

“You are right in pointing out China’s dramatic and rapid military build-up along with their assertive or sometimes even aggressive external behaviour.

“But at the same time it is more than China. We have been witnessing the development of a nuclear and missile program on the part of North Korea. And Russia is Japan’s immediate neighbour as well, and it has been conducting joint military exercises around Japan almost on a periodic basis.

“So there are various attempts being made to challenge the status quo in this region through intimidation and coercion.”

‘Natural development’

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida invited Prime Minister Anthony Albanese along with leaders from India, Indonesia, South Korea, Vietnam, Brazil, the Cook Islands and Comoros to the G7 summit in Hiroshima

[\[https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/australia-out-of-g7-doghouse-albanese-invited-to-japan-20230321-p5cu4q\]](https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/australia-out-of-g7-doghouse-albanese-invited-to-japan-20230321-p5cu4q), which will be held from May 19-21.

It is the third time in four G7 meetings an Australian PM has taken part. Former British PM Boris Johnson had floated adding Australia, India and South Korea as permanent members and turning the G7 into the “D10” of democratic nations.

Mr Yamagami said it was a “natural development” for Japan to invite Australia to be part of this year’s G7 because of the tightening bond between Canberra and Tokyo.

Asked whether Australia should become a permanent member, Mr Yamagami said there was no stated position of his government on the matter, but he personally was in favour.

These champagne-drinking, wishy-washy diplomats conducting diplomacy behind the scenes, I think those days are long gone.

— Shingo Yamagami, Japan’s outgoing ambassador

“I would love to see Australia joining us at the G7. The gravity of the global community has been shifting to this region, the Indo-Pacific, and this region needs now to be better represented,” he said.

“Australia is a global power. Australia is more than a middle power. Australia’s intelligence is effective. Your military is agile and Aussie diplomats are everywhere. So, I think it is high time that Australian voices are to be heard better.”

Mr Yamagami has been vocal in recent months airing concerns over increased Queensland coal royalties [<https://www.afr.com/link/follow-20180101-p5bfqe>] and the risk that federal gas market intervention could disrupt gas exports to Japan.

He said it was only natural there would be issues of contention or even friction from time to time. “When those issues take place, I think it’s really important for our two countries to have honest and candid and to the point discussions.”

Mr Yamagami’s strident style, public hawkishness on China and closeness to senior Coalition figures has raised eyebrows in Canberra and Tokyo, and there were suggestions Foreign Minister Penny Wong was not a fan.

He denied he had been recalled to Japan after less than 2½ years as envoy, saying in the Japanese system ambassadors did not have fixed terms.

Mr Yamagami described Senator Wong as a “remarkable” minister, but more broadly was unapologetic about going on the front foot.

“I’m speaking based on the conviction we are now living in this era of public diplomacy,” he said.

“These champagne-drinking, wishy-washy diplomats conducting diplomacy behind the scenes, I think those days are long gone.”



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