

Remarks by H.E Ambassador SUZUKI Kazuhiro

on the occasion of the

Japan Self-Defense Forces Day Reception

Wednesday 18 October 2023

Before I begin, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land upon which we meet, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, and pay my respects to their elders past, present, and emerging.

Esteemed Members and Senators of the Parliament of Australia
General Angus Campbell, Chief of the Defence Force
Ms. Rachel Noble, Director-General of Australian Signal Directorate
Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very much delighted and honoured to commemorate with you all the 69th anniversary of the establishment of the Japan Self-Defense Force.

Since July 1954, when our Self-Defense Force (or SDF) was formed, the international security environment has undergone dramatic changes, and in turn, the SDF has evolved in response to such changes.

One prime example of this evolution is the degree to which the SDF is actively involved in international humanitarian assistance across the globe.

A quick glance at the many examples of deep cooperation between Japan and Australia brings to mind our counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden since 2009, the assistance rendered by the SDF to Australia during the Black Summer bushfires of 2020, and our joint efforts in response to the volcanic eruption off Tonga in early 2022.

The world, and our region in particular, currently stands at an historical

turning point.

If blatant violations of international law such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine are allowed to become established fact, then there is every possibility that similar attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force may occur in other parts of the globe.

Prime Minister KISHIDA himself has addressed this issue, going so far as to state that "Ukraine may be the East Asia of tomorrow".

The world is also paying close attention to the situation in Gaza with deep concern. Japan has unequivocally condemned the recent terror attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian militants on innocent civilians. Japan will continue to work together with the international community to swiftly realise the release of hostages, the safety of citizens there, that all the parties act in accordance with international law, and the swift de-escalation of the situation.

In the wake of such events, a need has arisen for like-minded countries who share the fundamental values of freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law to further strengthen their partnerships.

On this point, it gives me great pleasure to note that in the Indo-Pacific region, Japan and Australia continue to enhance our cooperation as 'allies in all but name'.

The entry into force of our Reciprocal Access Agreement (or RAA) on the 13th of August marked a watershed moment in the evolution of our defence ties, providing a legal backbone through which our forces can work together, including our SDF in Australia and the ADF in Japan.

Yet never ones to rest on our laurels, this year we have already participated in a range of bilateral and multilateral exercises together, most prominent among them being Southern Jackaroo, Bushido Guardian, and Talisman Sabre.

With the entry into force of the RAA, there are strong expectations for a gradual increase in tempo in training and exercises between the SDF and ADF, along with other forms of defence cooperation.

As proof of that increased activity, I would just like to point out the superb effort made by all of the defence attaches at the Embassy, who in many cases have literally been run off their feet crisscrossing both Australia and the South Pacific.

They've burned plenty of midnight oil and lost a fair bit of weight in the process. This is despite a daily diet of Aussie beef, so we're talking real commitment here folks!

Recently, I had the privilege of visiting RAAF base Tindal to welcome the arrival of the first JASDF F-35A fighter aircraft to visit Australia, the first such visit since the entry into force of the RAA, and to attend the opening ceremony for Japan-Australia F-35 joint training.

The sight of Japanese and Australia F-35s lined up next to one another left a deep, profound impression on me.

As many of you are no doubt aware, in February 1942 the city of Darwin, itself not far removed from Tindal, was subject to air raids by Imperial Japanese aircraft, in turn becoming the site for the greatest number of casualties suffered by any location in Australia during the Second World War.

Yet it was Darwin that deepened the reconciliation between both nations, so much so that our pilots now treat one another as mates and have built relationships through which they entrust one another with their lives.

This development resonates particularly strongly with me. My own father, who passed away many years ago, was trained as a kamikaze pilot during the Pacific War and had been tasked with sacrificing himself in a kamikaze attack on the allied fleet off Okinawa.

He didn't or couldn't die, of course, and in time I was born. My father, who felt a deep sense of guilt until the day he died for having survived, was a man with lifelong awareness and first-hand experience of the preciousness of preserving peace.

I'd like to think that looking down on his son from heaven, in reconciliation with a former foe and working hard to build a relationship of friendship and trust, that it brings a little smile to his face.

Thank you.

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