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## **Japan and Australia face a turning point in world history**

**Yoko Kamikawa**

Security Canberra and Tokyo back a free and open international order against unilateral attempts to coerce, says a contender in Japan's prime ministerial race.

I am overjoyed to be returning to Australia after five years – and for the first time as foreign minister – to attend the 11th Japan-Australia Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations (Japan-Australia 2+2).

Ten hours of travelling brings me from the heat of Japan to an Australia that is at long last welcoming spring.

This starkly reminds us that Japan and Australia are in different hemispheres. However, in the world of diplomacy there are few partners so close to one another as Japan and Australia.

Both countries work hand in glove together, based on our strong strategic alignment, to respond to all sorts of international challenges.

Co-operation between Japan and Australia does not stop at the bilateral level, but extends to various frameworks – such as the G20, APEC, the CPTPP, the WTO, the QUAD, the IP4 (Indo-Pacific 4: Japan, Australia, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea) – and has become a significant driving force for both countries' diplomacy.

This is the reason Japan and Australia are special strategic partners. There is nothing more reassuring for Japan than the nearby presence of Australia, connected by the Pacific Ocean, strongly sharing our values and principles and working together to realise a free and open Indo-Pacific as close allies of the United States.

Japan and Australia dramatically expanded the scope of co-operation following World War II. The postwar reconciliation saw dramatic expansion of people-to-people and cultural exchanges to the point that Australia now has the highest number of Japanese language learners per head of population in the world.

From an economic perspective as well, our two countries are intertwined, Japan is Australia's second-largest trading partner and Australia is Japan's third-largest.

The Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement has seen Australian-produced wine and beef become more common in restaurants and households throughout Japan.

Furthermore, Japanese investment is contributing to the development of Australia's energy and resources industry, while Australian LNG underpins Japan's economic activities.

Among the many areas of partnership between Japan and Australia that continue to deepen, in recent years security cooperation in particular has strengthened remarkably.

Amid the increasingly severe regional and global situation, it is natural that close friends Japan and Australia continue to deepen our security co-operation together with like-minded partners in the region.

The importance of Australia to Japan in this area was writ large in the National Security Strategy and National Defence Strategy that Japan adopted two years ago.

Both documents identified Australia first among those like-minded countries that Japan co-operates with for the maintenance and development of the free and open international order. With Canberra, Tokyo will build a relationship second only to Japan-US defence co-operation.

In 2022, the two nations issued the new Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Co-operation and last year the entry into force of the Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement, which was a first for Japan.

A number of joint training and exercises have already been conducted under the agreement. Japan has also welcomed AUKUS partners' consideration of cooperation with Tokyo on AUKUS Pillar II advanced capability projects.

In the face of increasingly complicated security challenges, co-operation between Japan and Australia goes beyond traditional defence and has expanded broadly into fields including the cyber and information space, economic security, women, peace and security, and more.

We are at a turning point in history. The peaceful and stable international environment faces serious threats, including unilateral attempts to change the status quo through the use of force and coercion.

Given the international situation, now is the time to continue to further strengthen the already resolute security co-operation between Japan and Australia.

Engaging with a wide range of partner countries, together we play a leading role in maintaining and strengthening a free and open international order based on the rule of law. This is the main purpose of my visit to Australia.

This Japan-Australia 2+2 will be held in Queenscliff, Victoria. This historic town overlooks the sea lanes leading from the open ocean to Melbourne, and its port and fortifications have long played an important role in Australia's coastal defence.

It is a great pleasure to open a new chapter in the future of security cooperation between Japan and Australia here.

Together with Japan's defence minister, Minoru Kihara, we will engage in discussions with Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Defence Minister Richard Marles.

I am very much looking forward to candidly exchanging views on the strategic challenges facing both our countries in this tranquil place, surrounded by the deep blue sea and verdant nature.

Yoko Kamikawa is the Japanese foreign minister.