

# Keynote Speech by Defense Minister Kishi at the 89th Ottawa Conference on Security and Defence (Provisional Translation)

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Japan Ministry of Defense

## Opening

Good afternoon, Honorable Ministers, Distinguished guests, Your Excellencies, I am KISHI Nobuo, Minister of Defense of Japan. It is my great honor to be the first Japanese Defense Minister invited to this forum, and to provide the keynote speech at this, the Ottawa Conference on Security and Defence 2021. Before going any further, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Conference of Defence Associations and CDA Institute, and all parties concerned for coordinating this event and providing me the opportunity to speak.

The key theme of this year's Ottawa Conference is "Securing Democracy and Sovereignty against a Thousand Cuts," which is an important subject and I think a very timely one given the current security environment.

Japan and Canada are important partners in the Indo-Pacific region that share universal values, such as democracy, which is also bannered in today's theme, even as we are located across the western and eastern edges of the vast Pacific. Today, I would like to share with all those gathering in the eastern Pacific the reality concerning "democracy" and "sovereignty" in the western Pacific. In doing so, I would like to refer to the Pacific security environment and discuss the direction of our security cooperation, including Japan-Canada defense cooperation.

## Universal values and regional situation

"Democracy" is one of the key words for today's theme. It is a universal value, joining concepts such as "freedom," "respect for basic human rights," and "the rule of law." Along with protecting "sovereignty," the other pillar represented in today's theme, the maintenance and protection of an international order based on rules and universal values is one of Japan's important national interests.

Regrettably, the international community is witnessing the reality that the international order based on universal values, which has underpinned the stability and prosperity of the world, is being challenged by unilateral attempts to change the status quo by coercion, as well as by the spread of terrorism and violent extremism. This is the reality we face, and the Indo-Pacific region is no exception.

## Situation in Hong Kong

In such situations, the first thing that comes to my mind is our friends in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is an extremely important partner with which Japan maintains close economic ties and people-to-people exchanges. It is the long-standing position of Japan to attach great importance to upholding the free and open system which Hong Kong has been enjoying and the democratic and stable development of Hong Kong under the "One Country, Two Systems" framework.

In 2019, large-scale protests occurred in Hong Kong concerning an amendment to the extradition bill that would broaden its application to countries and regions including mainland China. Chinese authorities continue to severely clamp down on human rights activists and intellectuals. There is growing concern in the international community about the state of human rights in Hong Kong.

Our grave concern has intensified over the decision made by China's National People's Congress on March 11 to change the electoral system in Hong Kong following a series of arrests and prosecutions of pro-democracy politicians and activists since the enactment of the national security law last June.

In particular, the decision this time will further undermine confidence in the Hong Kong Basic Law and the "One Country, Two Systems" framework, which has been the cornerstone of Hong Kong's prosperity, and also represents a major setback for the high degree of autonomy in Hong Kong. Japan cannot overlook this. Japan calls on China to hold in a fair manner relevant elections in Hong Kong that are open to candidates representing a wide range of political opinions.

## Relations between China and Taiwan

When we witness such situation surrounding Hong Kong, I also cannot help but recall our friends in Taiwan as well. Taiwan is an extremely important partner and a dear friend of Japan. We share universal values such as freedom, democracy, basic human rights and the rule of law, and enjoy close economic ties and people to people exchanges.

As the security environment surrounding Japan is becoming ever more severe, the military balance in this region is also changing. For instance, in recent years, while China has rapidly strengthened its military power, the military balance between China and Taiwan has changed in favor of China on the whole, with its lead trending wider year after year. China is strongly opposed to any foreign intervention in the unification of China as well as any move towards the independence of

Taiwan and has repeatedly stated that it has not renounced the use of force.

We expect that cross-straits issues will be resolved peacefully by direct dialogue between the concerned parties and such a resolution will contribute to stability in the region. JMOD will continue to closely monitor the changing military balance in the region.

### **The rule of law in the maritime domain and the South China Sea**

‘The rule of law’, which must be fully preserved in the maritime domain, is another universal value. “Free, Open and Stable Seas,” which are upheld by a maritime order governed by law and rules rather than force, are foundations for the peace and prosperity of the international community. Nevertheless, it has been observed to unilaterally assert rights or take actions, based on assertions, which are incompatible with the existing international order and international law. That freedom of navigation in the high seas and freedom of overflight have been unduly infringed on a continuous basis cannot be ignored.

For instance, in the South China Sea, China has continued its militarization of disputed features and frequently conducts military exercises, and it appears that China launched ballistic missiles. Also, in April last year, a Vietnamese fishing boat sank after clashing with a Chinese coast guard vessel. China has been escalating its activities and we are seriously concerned about the situation.

Japan has consistently supported upholding the rule of law in the South China Sea, while focusing on ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight and ensuring the safety of sea lanes. Japan will continue to emphasize the importance of all parties involved in the South China Sea working toward the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

### **Sovereignty and regional situation**

Another key theme today is “sovereignty.” The noble responsibility of “Defending Japan’s peace and sovereignty” has been entrusted into my hands since I was appointed as Defense Minister last September. In line with my firm determination to safeguard the lives and peaceful livelihood of our people, and the integrity of our territory, waters and airspace, I have committed myself to fulfilling my responsibilities, leading about 250,000 SDF members.

Today, I would like to call your attention to the situation the region, including Japan is facing in terms of sovereignty

In the East China Sea, China continues its attempts to change the status quo by coercion in the waters around the Senkaku Islands, Japan’s inherent territory. Last year represented a record high in terms of continuous time of intrusion into Japan’s territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands by China Coast Guard vessels, which was more than 57 hours, and also in terms of the number of consecutive days of navigation within the contiguous zone, which was 111 days. Moreover, the total number of days of navigation within the contiguous zone in a single year also marked a record high of 333 days last year.

The situation is becoming much more serious in view of repeated incidents by China Coast Guard vessels approaching Japanese fishing boats while intruding into Japan’s territorial waters. These activities by China Coast Guard vessels are a violation of Japan’s sovereignty and they are completely unacceptable.

China has relentlessly continued its unilateral attempts to change the status quo by coercion as described, and against such a backdrop, the new China’s Coast Guard Law entered into force on February 1.

The China Coast Guard is continuing to enlarge and arm its vessels. China is also enhancing collaboration between the military and the Coast Guard in terms of organization, equipment and personnel, by incorporating the Coast Guard into the Chinese People’s Armed Police Force, which operates under the centralized command of the Central Military Commission, transferring Navy ships to the Coast Guard and allocating key personnel positions to those from the Navy.

China’s new Coast Guard Law was enacted against this backdrop, and as I have pointed out previously on numerous occasions, this law includes problematic provisions in terms of its consistency with international law; namely, an ambiguous scope of applicable waters and authority for the use of weapons. It is important that the legitimate interests of affected countries including Japan, must not be undermined by this law, and it is absolutely unacceptable that the law raises tension in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. The Republic of the Philippines and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, coastal countries of the South China Sea, have also raised their concerns and objected to China’s Coast Guard Law.

Stable Japan-China relations are of course vital not only for both countries but also for the region and the international community. Although there are various pending issues of concern between the two countries, we will not shy away from saying what needs to be said, and through opportunities such as high level exchanges we will strongly call for concrete action.

In December last year, I held a video teleconference with Chinese State Councilor and Defense Minister, Wei Fenghe, and

exchanged unreserved views. I believe that seeking opportunities to communicate with China to deliver firmly our candid concerns is extremely important, and I always welcome constructive communication.

Having that in mind, in order to fulfill my responsibilities as Japan's Defense Minister, I will continue to take a calm and resolute approach, and urge what needs to be urged, in line with my ongoing commitment and firm determination to safeguard lives and peaceful livelihood of our people, and the integrity of our territory, waters and airspace. With regard to China's Coast Guard Law as well, I will continue to be attentive to strong concerns and anxiety from many people including countries in the region, and advocate internationally in concert with affected countries.

Based on my strong concerns, I have shared my unreserved views on what is happening right now in the western Pacific, including the activities of China.

In addition, in recent years, we have seen a continued tendency towards the prolongation of so-called gray-zone situations, which are neither purely peacetime nor contingency situations, and are associated with territories, sovereignty, and economic interests. The prolongation of such grey-zone situations is occurring as a form of inter-state competition, and has the potential to further increase and expand. Such gray-zone situations harbor the risk of rapidly escalating into graver situations without warning. It is no exaggeration to say that countries that enjoy universal values, such as "freedom of navigation," including Canada, might also face these risks.

Today, I have wanted to share widely with all guests and viewers of this conference the reality of the current situation, and, in addition, I would like to introduce Japan's approach, the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific," which addresses the current security environment.

### **Promoting the "FOIP"**

Even amid the realities of the prevailing security environment we have hitherto never faced, as Minister of Defense, I will defend to the end people's lives and peaceful livelihood, and robustly fulfill my responsibility to proactively contribute to peace and stability of the region and the international community. To that end, we are pursuing the following measures: strengthening Japan's national defense architecture, positioning the Japan-U.S. Alliance as the cornerstone of our approach to security, strategically pursuing security cooperation with countries that share security interests and universal values such as freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights, and, working closely and assiduously with these countries.

The key pillar to Japan's promotion of such strategic security cooperation is our vision of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific FOIP."

### **About the "FOIP"**

The "FOIP" vision was unveiled by former Prime Minister Abe in his keynote address at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (or TICAD) VI in Kenya in August 2016. Japan has been promoting the "FOIP" vision based on a concept that achieving a free and open rules-based order will enhance peace and prosperity across the entire region and throughout the world.

The "FOIP" vision is an inclusive vision, which is not in competition with, nor exclusive of specific countries. Japan will enhance cooperation with all countries that share the values inherent to this vision.

### **The MOD/SDF Approach**

Under the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" vision, the MOD/SDF has been strategically pursuing security cooperation with Canada, as our partner in the Indo-Pacific region, the United States, as our ally, Australia, New Zealand, partners from Europe including the United Kingdom, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. Moreover, recently we have been collaborating positively with countries in the region, such as among the Pacific Islands, the Middle East, and Africa.

I am aware that Rt Hon Ben Wallace, the Secretary of State for Defence of the UK also attended the conference today. The UK has announced the plan to deploy HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH and her Carrier Strike Group to the region including East Asia. I would like to continue working closely with Minister Wallece so that the planned visit will contribute to a free and open Indo-Pacific.

The MOD/SDF has developed various means for pursuing such security cooperation, including people-to-people exchanges, bilateral/multilateral exercises and strategic port calls that utilize JSDF ships and aircraft, human resources development and cooperation for capacity building purposes, developed in our own approach to value heart-to-heart connections with partners, and defense equipment and technology cooperation, supported by reliable and advanced technological capabilities.

Furthermore, we have been expanding the scope of security cooperation among defense authorities not only within the traditional domains of land, sea and air, but also through the new domains of space and cyberspace, as well as on global

issues, such as international terrorism, piracy and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and additionally, combat against infectious diseases in view of the spread of COVID-19.

### **Expectations for the Japan-Canada Defense Relationship**

In order to uphold and reinforce the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” vision, we would like to further develop the Japan-Canada defense relationship, as we both are Indo-Pacific countries that share fundamental values.

As evidenced in the Joint Statement of Japan-Canada Defense Cooperation issued in 2019, the implementation of the ACSA, monitoring and surveillance activities against illicit maritime activities including ship-to-ship transfers with North Korean-flagged vessels and the continuation of Japan-Canada bilateral exercise “KAEDEX”, bilateral defense cooperation has steadily developed. I look forward to deepening Japan-Canada defense cooperation in order to further reinforce our presence in the Indo-Pacific region.

### **Closing**

I would like to conclude my speech by once again extending my gratitude for this opportunity and for your time. I am certain this Ottawa Conference will foster a productive ongoing discussion after its conclusion, and that the countries represented at this event here will continue to work together to protect universal values.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.