

**20<sup>th</sup> Shangri-La Dialogue (2023)**

**DM Hamada Speech at the 4<sup>th</sup> session “Asia’s Evolving Maritime Security Order”**

Dr. Chipman, distinguished guests, it is a great honor for me to deliver a speech at this gathering once again after serving as Japan’s Defense Minister fourteen years ago. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and the Singapore Government for hosting this Dialogue. I am also extremely privileged to join this session with Minister Jonson of Sweden and Minister Tikoduadua of Fiji.

Now, we stand at a crossroad between “conflict and discord” in one direction, and “cooperation and harmony” in the other. In 2009, when I last spoke here, the threat posed by non-state actors was the imminent challenge to the world. Today, however, competition and conflicts among states have once again emerged as urgent challenges. In the Indo-Pacific region, there are ongoing unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion particularly in the maritime domain.

As I mentioned in my last speech to this Dialogue, “it is important to make efforts … to prevent confrontations which this region has experienced in the past,” and these words still resonate today. To prevent confrontations in the Indo-Pacific region, and to uphold the free and open international order based on the rule of law, we must not only make efforts to dissuade unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion, but also enhance communication in order to avoid misunderstandings and miscalculations, and to promote confidence-building through dialogue.

Today, I will discuss the responsibilities that Japan is going to fulfill in order to seek and realize peace.

Aspiring peace, countless people have made great sacrifices and diligently worked over generations to create an international order based on the rule of law. Russia's aggression against Ukraine is a violation of international law and an outrageous act that shakes the very foundation of the international order based on the rule of law built by our predecessors.

If we tolerate or turn a blind eye to this aggression, it will send the wrong message that unilateral changes to the status quo by force will be accepted or not be opposed in other regions as well. The international community is now being called upon to unite in order to champion international principles and shared values.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine provides us with various lessons. A particularly crucial one is the importance of preventing confrontation. It has been more than a year since the start of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Every day we are still facing the dire situation in Ukraine. We must acknowledge this reality.

If a unilateral change to the status quo by force is attempted and an aggression occurs, it would lead to a prolonged war that will deprive prosperity which could have been enjoyed by all, opportunities for international cooperation to address global challenges, and above all, the lives of those meant to carry our future generations. It is evident from the history of this region overcoming hardships that significant time and effort would be required for the postwar reconstruction. To avoid repeating this error, it is essential for us to stand united and make concerted efforts to prevent confrontation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Another lesson we must learn is the importance of a free and open international order based on the rule of law in the maritime domain. Russia's blockade of the Black Sea and attacks on ports including Odesa have led to an energy and food crisis, and brought about significant global impacts, because "sea lanes" are the arteries that sustain the world. In order to protect people's safety and livelihood, "sea lanes" must be free, open, and stable.

In the Indo-Pacific region, and particularly in the maritime domain upon which our shared peace and prosperity are founded, the existing international order based on the rule of law is facing various challenges. This situation raises mistrust and concerns that unilateral changes to the status quo by force or coercion may be just around the corner.

For instance, the normalization of coercive military actions involving ballistic missile launches, and repeated intrusions into territorial sea by foreign government vessels infringe on “free, open, and stable seas.” In particular, in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, unilateral changes to the status quo by force or coercion, and further attempts are advancing, which is based on their assertions that are incompatible with the existing international order. Moreover, the use of influence acquired through economic coercion and through development finance that is lacking transparency and fairness can be seen to be affecting coastal countries along the “sea lanes.” Additionally, in the underwater domain, such as regarding undersea cables, risks including human error or intentional destruction are becoming apparent.

In order to address this challenging security environment, Japan newly formulated its “National Security Strategy,” “National Defense Strategy,” and “Defense Buildup Program” last December. Under these strategic documents, we aim to prevent confrontation and uphold the free and open international order based on the rule of law. As the Shangri-La Dialogue is valued as an important platform for defense diplomacy by the IISS, diplomatic efforts among defense authorities become a crucial component for peace and stability of the international society. In order to contribute to diplomatic efforts by the whole government of Japan, the Japan Ministry of Defense will proactively promote diplomatic efforts in defense sphere for peace among defense authorities and fundamentally enhance its own defense capabilities.

In any situation, diplomatic efforts should be pursued first. The Japan Ministry of Defense will strengthen cooperation with our ally and like-minded countries, as well as enhance communications and promote confidence-building, including with countries posing challenges to regional stability.

Firstly, while keeping in mind the possibility of contingencies, Japan will increase cooperation and collaboration with our ally and like-minded countries to enhance regional bonds of solidarity. This naturally includes further strengthening the deterrence and response capabilities of the Japan-U.S. Alliance. Furthermore, Japan will expand bilateral and multilateral cooperation and exchanges in various fields, taking into consideration the characteristics of the region and the circumstances of each country.

In particular, Japan will proactively support the improvement of security capabilities of like-minded countries. In order to promote maritime security, a pillar of Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP), efforts will be made through the newly established "Official Security Assistance" (OSA), as well as through existing initiatives including capacity building assistance, and transfer of defense equipment and technology.

Japan believes that enhancing bonds of solidarity with our ally and like-minded countries will deter attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force or coercion, and will also promote the pursuit of peaceful resolutions with other countries that are posing challenges to regional stability.

Furthermore, we aim to avoid misunderstandings and miscalculations, and foster trust through dialogue by enhancing communications including with other countries that are posing challenges to regional stability.

In an unstable security environment filled with concerns and distrust, it is essential to maintain constant communication to avoid unforeseen circumstances. To this end, Japan has been working towards establishing a "constructive and stable relationship" with China, and has been operating the "Maritime and Aerial

Communication Mechanism between the Japan-China Defense Authorities.” Additionally, we began the operation of the “Hotline between Japanese and Chinese Defense Authorities” in May of this year.

Furthermore, it is crucial for regional countries to work together as one to promote confidence building and prevent confrontation. Particularly, we will continue to place importance on opportunities for dialogue provided by ASEAN-led multi-layered regional cooperative frameworks, such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ADMM-Plus, as well as this Dialogue, commemorating its 20th event.

This initiative literally seeks peace with inclusiveness, encompassing all countries.

Not to mention, Japan needs to fundamentally reinforce its defense capabilities. This effort aims to improve the deterrence capacity of the region in concert with the ally and like-minded countries, and intends to deter challenges to the existing international order based on the rule of law. This will be done within the purview of international law, will adhere to the basic precepts of maintaining an exclusively defense-oriented policy, and does not aim to establish military power that poses threats to other countries.

The strengthening of regional deterrence by Japan and our ally and like-minded countries will bring each country a position of strength that does not succumb to force, and indeed will provide a solid footing for diplomatic efforts in order to resolve differences in interests and opinions through dialogue.

My message here is clear and simple. We do not seek rivalry or conflict. As a nation that genuinely desires peace, we aim to enhance our own and regional deterrence capabilities and promote the resolution of differences in interests and opinions through dialogue. Through these efforts, we aim to prevent confrontation, as we experienced in the past in this region, and uphold the free and

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open international order based on the rule of law.

At this significant juncture in history, we must not become despondent. Let us create an era where the year of 2023 will be called as a turning point towards a world of “cooperation and harmony,” and pass it on to future generations. Thank you for your attention.