

The word according to Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sat down with *AFR Weekend* Editor-in-Chief Michael Stutchbury and correspondent Angus Grigg in Tokyo on January 18. Here is an edited transcript.



THE ABE INTERVIEW

AFR | Prime Minister, thank you for agreeing to this interview with *AFR Weekend*. Australia and Japan together have shown leadership on regional trade agreements, especially after the US pulled out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership a year ago. Prime Minister Turnbull told a lunch in Tokyo today that Australia was keen to conclude the TPP by March, even if countries like Canada and the US weren't ready to agree. Is that also Japan's position?

■ **Shinzo Abe** | Last year in January when I visited Australia President Trump had already expressed his intention to move away from the TPP, although the final announcement to that effect came a little later. So at that time it was already known that the US was more or less negative on the agreement. So on that occasion with Prime Minister Turnbull, we reaffirmed our thinking. I suggested that with TPP11, we should make efforts so that this agreement will come into force.

This idea of mine was agreed to by Prime Minister Turnbull and we decided to work with various countries to this effect. And then last year in Da Nang, Vietnam, on the occasion of the TPP ministerial meeting, broad agreement was reached. Together with Malcolm we shall work on a TPP agreement.

Participating members of TPP will bear in mind that [Chilean] President Bachelet will be retiring in March so we will look to see enhanced negotiation. In any event, we will work toward the final conclusion of TPP and signing of this agreement.

Australian defence ties

AFR | You and Prime Minister Turnbull toured Japanese military facilities this morning. Is this a sign that both nations have agreed they need to do significantly more together to support regional security?

■ **Abe** | Today, together with Prime

Minister Turnbull we visited the Narashino military base of our self defence forces and we observed the exercise of special operation activities by a special unit.

We also observed the Bushmaster, a vehicle made in Australia. So, inclusive of defence equipment, we would like to have a final discussion toward the facilitation agreement on matters of security.

In any event, I think we have the closest relations between Japan and Australia in the history of the two countries in security, economic matters and people to people exchanges.

Both countries are delivering joint exercises and both are also delivering systems toward the enhanced law enforcement capabilities of south-east Asian countries.

In January 2015 the EPA [Economic Partnership Agreement] between Japan and Australia was concluded. So, inclusive of the economic activities I think we have enjoyed the closest-ever relationship between the two countries.

There are 108 sister city agreements between the two countries, so not only at the government-to-government level but on a local basis, too, we have broadened and strengthened relations.

Regional security

AFR | How concerned are you that the Asia Pacific security framework that has supported our region's peace and prosperity for decades is being disrupted by both China assertiveness as a rising power and by the US seeking to wear less of the cost of supporting the framework?

■ **Abe** | With respect to security matters between Japan and Australia, during the first Abe administration prime minister Howard and myself reaffirmed the enhancement of the security environment. So that is the first connection.

With Prime Minister Turnbull more specifically, as I mentioned, there will be joint exercise involving [Japan's] self-defence forces and Australian forces. So I believe that there are concrete outcomes and consequences that we have seen as a result of the close connection between the two countries.

Now, looking at the security situation broadly, there are threats coming from North Korea. And there is an attempt to alter the present status in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. So I think the security



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situation is becoming tougher these days.

These points were already noted and presented in the White Paper on Australian diplomacy which was issued in November by your country.

When it comes to the US-Japan alliance and also the US-Australia alliance, it is critically important for the peace and stability of this region to have an American presence in this region. I think this critical importance is unchanged.

Also in November, there was a strategy policy announced or presented from the United States, which says it will co-operate with allied countries as well as with the international community to exercise leadership.

This position is clearly stated in your policy as well. In November we held a trilateral summit meeting between President Trump and Mr Turnbull and myself, and we affirmed the importance of these three countries' relationship in contributing to the peace and stability of the region.

Also in the United States, the year before last, immediately after the election of Mr Trump as president, I had a meeting with him and on that occasion explained the importance of the US presence to this region.



Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe meets *AFR Weekend* at his official residence in Tokyo. PHOTOS, KO SASAKI

When I visited President Trump in February last year, I again explained the importance of the US presence. I also explained the importance of the collaboration and alliance involving the US and Australia. President Trump shares that perception.

The Indo-Pacific

AFR | What is your ultimate goal for your concept of the Indo-Pacific region and the revived Quadrilateral Security Dialogue? Could the Quad evolve into closer military co-operation that, for example, would require Australia and Japan to come to each other's aid?

■ **Abe** First I would like to state that both Japan and Australia are maritime nations facing the Pacific Ocean. So this is the basis of the free and open Indo-Pacific Strategy.

I think it is fair to say that as maritime nations our nationhood really stands because our nations trade across the Indo-Pacific area.

And people will exchange and ships will go to and fro and aircraft will also fly over the Indo-Pacific region. So because of free exchanges and free movements, the free nations can hold... In other words, the

important thing is that the Indo Pacific remains a free public good.

So I think Australians are thinking of attaching importance to the open and comprehensive, prosperous rules-based region and to free trading... I think this concept of Australia's is hitting a chord with what we call the Indo-Pacific strategy.

I would like to illustrate one point in this context. I believe it was in 2007 when I was Prime Minister. I did a speech at the national parliament and I explained the concept of the two oceans coming or mingling together.

Ensuring the Indo Pacific remains a free and open public good will require the co-operation of four countries: Japan, Australia, India and the US. We share strategic values.

So while maintaining co-operation, we will be contributing to the foundation of the region's prosperity, that is the peace and stability of the region, which is very important. This does not necessarily mean engaging in any military activities.

What I would like to say is that we should raise our voice about the importance of co-operation as well as the rule of law. We have to have freedom of navigation. So by raising our voices and engaging in concrete activities we wish to accomplish what I want.

Another important thing is to ensure international standards in running infrastructure like the ports and harbours.

Infrastructure investment must be open and transparent. It must also have the fiscal health. So infrastructure projects must follow international standards.

It is also very important to support south-east Asian countries as well as Pacific Island countries – coastal nations – so their maritime enforcement capability can be assisted and enhanced.

For the stability of this region it is very important that Japan's self-defence force, the Australian navy, the American navy, and the Indian navy co-operate to contribute to stability.

But [the military aspect] is not the only aspect. There are more comprehensive aspects to this concept.

Rising China

AFR | How can Beijing be reassured that this would not be a form of containment of China?

■ **Abe** This idea is not to contain China, nor to stand against [a] rising China. If China agrees with this concept, of course we will work on them coming into the group. ■