

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties relating to the Australia-Japan Supplies and Services Agreement

My submission is that the Supplies and Services Agreement between Australia and Japan is mutually beneficial and will advance Australia's national interests in the Asia-Pacific region.

Japan is a significant ally in the Asia-Pacific region. The exchange of supplies and services between Australia and Japan's respective military forces will strengthen our alliance with Japan and our military capability. The agreement is especially important in the wake of the following international developments:

Firstly, China is becoming an increasingly dominant power in the Asia-Pacific region. China is using military power to assert its sovereignty over disputed territories, such as islands in the South China Sea and the Senkaku/Diayou islands. This includes the construction of airfields and sending naval patrols into disputed territory. In doing so, China has shown disregard for international law. For example, in 2016 China ignored a ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea against its claim to bodies in the South China Sea. In the face of such aggression and militarisation in our region, Australia should seek allies committed to the international rule of law and peaceful diplomacy. Having states committed to a rules based international order will uphold peace and stability in our region, which will further Australia's interests regarding national security and economic development. Our national security will also benefit from having allies committed to mutual defence, should Australia be threatened by an international conflict. Australia and Japan's relationship should thus be strengthened, including with the present Supplies and Services Agreement.

Secondly, Japan is poised to assume a greater role in regional and International affairs with changes to their Constitution. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has committed to revising Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which renounces the "threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes." He has also passed legislation that reinterprets Article 9 to allow for collective self-defence on behalf of allies, which means Japanese forces may be used overseas to support allies in the Asia-Pacific region or beyond. As Japan is emerging onto the world stage,

Australia should seek to strengthen our alliance accordingly to coordinate efforts to uphold regional and International security.

Thirdly, our alliance with the US is relatively unstable and unpredictable with the election of Donald Trump, who is a political and military neophyte, to the Presidency of the United States. The ANZUS treaty between Australia, New Zealand and the United States is central to our national security. The visit to Australia by US Vice-President Mike Pence and the meeting between Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and US President Donald Trump are positive signs that this relationship will continue. However, how the new administration will handle the challenges presented by the Asia-Pacific region is unclear. We should be wary of following the United States too closely, and should instead reach out to strengthen relations with other allies in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. Japan is one such ally that Australia will benefit from coordinating foreign policy objectives with.

There are many challenges that Australia and the rules based international order faces in the world, including in the Asia-Pacific region. With China assuming a more militaristic foreign policy and the US administration's policy still yet unformulated, Australia will benefit from pursuing closer relations with Japan. I recommend that the Supplies and Services Agreement thus be adopted.