

Speech by Defense Minister Tomomi Inada

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“Upholding the Rules-Based Regional Order”

Dr. Chipman, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I am truly honored to attend this year’s Shangri-La Dialogue. I would like to express my deep gratitude to the IISS and the Government of Singapore for hosting this event, which has become an important fixture in the international security arena. Singapore, of course, is strategically located, connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans. I can think of no other place more suitable than this beautiful country to discuss the regional order of the Indo-Pacific. I also feel privileged to share the podium with my fellow ministers: Minister Marise Payne of Australia, and Minister Sylvie Goulard of France. As you can readily see, Minister Payne, Minister Goulard, and I have much in common. We belong to the same gender; we belong to the same generation; and most importantly, we are all good looking.

Today, it is my great pleasure to speak on the very important theme, “Upholding the Rules-Based Regional Order.”

International rules set the standards for acceptable and non-acceptable conduct for every country as they carry out their diplomatic, economic and security-related affairs. Shared commitments by all countries to act in accordance with international rules brings about a safe, stable and inclusive world. This is a world where all countries are equal before the rules. A world in which every country has shared expectations about how other countries conduct themselves. A world in which tensions and differences are resolved peacefully without the use or threat of force to alter the status quo. A world in which every country, irrespective of its size and strength, has the chance to rise and prosper without fear of coercion or intimidation.

To be sure, international rules must adapt and evolve in order to stay relevant to changing circumstances, but not in a parochial, disruptive, disorderly way. No country benefits from forcefully altering the prevailing rules-based order. It is particularly unwise and counter-productive for a country to upend the rules-based order from which that country has accrued enormous benefits. Surely it would be unreasonable for a country to seek to undermine the order that has provided for a stable strategic environment: an environment that has enabled that very country to develop its economy and advance the well-being of its people.

The 2007 ASEAN Charter states that one of the purposes of ASEAN is to “enhance good governance and the rule of law” and that one of ASEAN’s principles is to uphold international law. ASEAN indeed plays an essential role in sustaining the rules-based international order. It is encouraging to see that ASEAN is further strengthening its unity under the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. We welcome and support the joint maritime patrolling efforts by regional countries in the Malacca Strait and the Sulu Sea, which represent their commitment to protect international rules to ensure security and continued prosperity.

Japan, too, is committed to the rule of law domestically and a rules-based order internationally. We are with those countries that endeavor to uphold a rules-based international order. Japan has promoted practical cooperation with partners under the banner of proactive contribution to peace. In dealing with challenges to the rules-based order, the Abe administration has not been a passive onlooker. Last year, the Legislation for Peace and Security came into effect in Japan. The purpose of the Legislation is not only to maintain the peace and security of Japan, but also to contribute even more proactively to the peace and stability of the international community. Japan has shown its resolve to uphold the order through our action, and I promise that Japan will continue this endeavor.

The United States is a long-time Pacific power. The ongoing presence of the United States in the Indo-Pacific continues to undergird the rules-based order of the region. We welcome U.S. policy to strengthen its position in the Indo-Pacific. The robust, long-standing Japan-U.S. alliance now functions as a public good that contributes to the peace and stability of the region. As exemplified by frequent summit and ministerial meetings between Japan and

the United States, the Japan-U.S. alliance continues to grow stronger under the U.S. administration of President Donald Trump. As Defense Minister, I will continue to work closely with U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis for even closer bilateral defense cooperation.

While many regional stakeholders strive to uphold the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, challenges come from many corners.

An urgent challenge is North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile development. In defiance of warnings from the international community, and against the series of legally binding United Nations Security Council resolutions, North Korea has engaged in multiple nuclear tests. North Korea also continues to conduct ballistic missile launches, improving the ability to operate its ballistic missile forces. The security threats North Korea poses to the region and beyond have now entered a new stage.

To address North Korea's threats, the Japan-U.S. alliance is further deepening cooperation and coordination. The United States is making clear through both words and deeds that "all options are on the table." I strongly support the U.S. position. Japan and the Republic of Korea are also promoting security cooperation through various measures including trilateral training with the United States. We must stand shoulder-to-shoulder to intensify pressure on North Korea through full, thorough and sustained implementation of all relevant UN resolutions. I urge North Korea to abandon its nuclear and ballistic missile programs in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner. North Korea must cease its provocative actions and abide by its international obligations and commitments.

In the East and South China Seas, we continue to witness unprovoked, unilateral attempts to alter the status quo based on assertions incompatible with existing international norms. In the East China Sea, government ships of a certain country continue to make periodic incursions into Japanese territorial waters. Regarding the South China Sea, the final award was rendered in the arbitration between the Philippines and China in July 2016. Despite the fact that this award is binding on both parties, the construction of outposts in the South China Sea and their use for military purposes continues. I am deeply concerned about the situation. The international community has an enormous stake in ensuring the freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea. The Indo-Pacific region also faces threats emanating from

terrorism, piracy, illegal migration and cyber-attacks.

In short, the rules-based regional order is under challenge. International rules and the order they underpin are not self-sustaining. Without the conscious, continued efforts of all nations and cooperation among them to validate these rules, they will hollow out. There is no room for complacency. If we are to seek peace and prosperity, we need to summon our resolve. We should not allow parochial pursuit of short-term gain to prevail at the expense of our long-term, shared interests. Now is the time to form a scrum to protect the rules-based order. In doing so, I believe that solidarity is the key.

To provide for stronger solidarity, I would posit that three “C”s are in order: Confidence building, Capacity building and Combined effort. The first “C” is confidence building. This is a prerequisite for more practical cooperation that contributes to solidarity among countries. States of this region have engaged in confidence building, but we should continue our efforts to achieve even greater trust and confidence. We should encourage, for example, enhancing the networks among the region’s uniformed personnel, civilian officials and academic researchers.

The second “C” is capacity building. Capacity building cooperation leads to stronger solidarity through the improvement of the region’s overall capability in the security arena, thereby expanding the horizon of practical cooperation among countries in the region. As part of Japan’s whole-of-government efforts, Japan’s Ministry of Defense has enhanced capacity building cooperation with ASEAN partners on a wide range of capability areas. These areas include: the promotion of international law, maritime security, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. In November 2016, we announced the “Vientiane Vision,” which represents a comprehensive and transparent picture of Japan’s defense cooperation with ASEAN. In accordance with the Vientiane Vision, we will continue capacity building cooperation with our ASEAN partners, and fully support ASEAN’s efforts to promote its centrality and unity.

The third “C” is combined effort. The shared experience of working together is the best stimulus for solidarity, and the Abe administration is promoting practical cooperation with regional partners. Japan and the United States conduct joint cruise training in the South China Sea and other places. I would like to reiterate my support for Freedom of Navigation

Operations by the U.S. Navy in the South China Sea. They represent the U.S. resolve to maintain the open, free and peaceful international maritime order.

Australia is Japan's Special Strategic Partner. Our partnership comes natural, as Japan and Australia have shared values, shared interests and shared concerns. The Japan-Australia security partnership provides an added layer of stability to the region and beyond. I will continue to work closely with Minister Payne to make our defense cooperation stronger. Japan's another Special Strategic Partner is India. Japan has been conducting bilateral and trilateral training with Australia and India together with the United States. Japan and India have agreed to seek further coordination between Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" and India's "Act East Policy."

Japan also welcomes European countries' presence in the region, as strong advocates of the rule of law. The recent joint training between Japan, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States indicates that our cooperation is now at a new stage. I would like to revisit the point then-Defense Minister of France, Mr. Le Drian, who is succeeded by Minister Goulard, made last year, here at the Shangri-La Dialogue. In his important speech, Minister Le Drian encouraged a regular and visible presence of European navies in this region. I strongly support this initiative by France.

I believe that these three "C"s will strengthen our solidarity, which will be necessary to defend a rules-based regional order. As a beneficiary of such an order, as are all of you, Japan will promote the three "C"s even more proactively.

Ladies and gentlemen, now is the time for us to join together and address our shared challenges. My personal motto is "tradition and creation": for any tradition to survive, creativity is required. In order for us to maintain and ensure the long-cherished traditions and norms that have underpinned the prosperity of the region, we must demonstrate our resourcefulness to overcome differences of interests and move forward together toward our common objectives. Only in this way can we bring about a region that is more stable and more prosperous. Thank you.