

(An opinion piece by Ambassador Makoto Osawa for NZ Herald on 18 May 2026)

A shared security path: How Japan and New Zealand are deepening defence ties

Today, the world is experiencing great structural changes caused by power balance shifts and increasing conflicts and confrontations. A free and open international order based on the rule of law is under serious threat throughout the globe and our Indo-Pacific region is not an exception.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of Japan's vision for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)". Japan and New Zealand, Strategic Cooperative Partners and neighbours across the Pacific, have been working together in realising FOIP in increasingly severe and complex international situations. I am confident this cooperation will continue to be enhanced under the vision of the updated FOIP, as announced by Prime Minister TAKAICHI Sanae this month, and we will become more resilient and prosperous together.

Recently, our two countries beefed up our framework for cooperation. The bilateral Information Security Agreement that provides a legal framework and procedures for handling the exchange of classified information between Japan and New Zealand took effect this March. The Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement, or ACSA, was also signed and submitted to the Japanese Diet. ACSA sets out how logistical support through the provision of supplies and services will be managed when the Self-Defense Forces of Japan and the New Zealand Defence Force operate together.

Having a legal framework is one thing, but what we try to achieve on the ground is another. Japan and New Zealand walk the talk. We deeply appreciate the monitoring and surveillance activities by the Royal New Zealand Navy and Air Force in support of the enforcement of UN Security Council sanctions against North Korea in our neighbourhood.

Likewise, a port call at Wellington by a Mogami-class frigate JS Kumano this week following those by JS Ise and JS Suzunami in August last year, demonstrates the improved security cooperation between our two countries who share responsibility for the stability of this region.

In today's world, no one country can safeguard its own peace and stability by itself, let alone that of the region as a whole. The help of partners is indispensable. On 21 April, Japan revised its defence equipment and technology transfer system (namely, the Three Principles on Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology and its Implementation Guidelines) in order to respond to demands from our partners for Japanese-made equipment. Our aim is to better contribute to preventing conflicts and ensuring the peace and stability of the world, this region included, during these uncertain times.

Needless to say, this revision will not undermine Japan's commitment to being a peace-loving nation. We have consistently upheld this principle and we are proud to have contributed to the peace and prosperity of the international community. The revision enables us to export, in principle, all categories of defence equipment and technology to foreign countries, with which Japan has

concluded a Defence Equipment and Technology Transfer Agreement obligating the use of the transferred defence equipment and technology in a manner consistent with the UN Charter.

We hope that this revision of Japan's defence equipment and technology transfer system will be a good starting point for further defence cooperation between Japan and New Zealand. In this context, New Zealand's decision on 7 May to focus on considering the Mogami-class frigate as one of the options for potential replacement of the Anzac frigates is a welcome sign.

As New Zealand's only official ally as well as one of Japan's closest security partners, Australia plays a key role in safeguarding both our shared interests. To maintain peace and stability in this region, enhanced coordination among Japan, New Zealand and Australia and increased interoperability for that purpose is crucial. I sincerely hope that Japan's new defence equipment and technology transfer system will help accelerate such tripartite cooperation. JS Kumano, which has sailed via Australia to New Zealand, symbolises our shared path towards an enhanced Japan-New Zealand relationship.

Makoto Osawa

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