

NEWS

Japan treaty boosts cooperation

Australia and Japan will be able to work together in military evacuations of foreign nationals under a new treaty examined by federal parliament's Treaties Committee.

The Japan-Australia Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement allows for closer logistical cooperation and sharing of resources such as fuel and transport when engaged in joint operations.

The treaty arrangements will be used primarily during exercises and training, humanitarian and peacekeeping missions and military-led evacuations.

Department of Defence assistant secretary Benjamin Burdon told a public hearing if the agreement had been in place last year it would have improved cooperation between the two countries working on the assistance mission in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake.

Australia offered to provide uplift for Japanese disaster relief crews and materials, but was restricted by the

logistics of loading and carrying Japanese equipment on Australian aircraft.

"Certainly we were willing to do so, and there was will on both sides to do so," Mr Burdon said. "Unfortunately we were defeated by some of the technical considerations."

Air Vice Marshal Margaret Staib said the purpose of the agreement is to set in place a framework to facilitate such activities, rather than making ad hoc arrangements during operations.

"The agreement is significant as it is the only logistic support treaty that Japan has in place in addition to its current logistics agreement with the United States," she said. "In particular it will benefit Australia by formalising and enhancing the quality of and potential for defence cooperation with Japan."

The treaty does not apply to offensive operations and specifically excludes the exchange of military equipment such as weapons systems or explosives.



HEALTHY RELATIONS: Closer ties between Australia and Japan. Photo: Department of Defence

It will also not apply to evacuation operations using commercial rather than military aircraft, such as the recent evacuations of Australians from Egypt. •

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Prisoners in China may come home



HEMELCOMING: Jailed Australians could benefit from transfer treaty. Photo: photolibrary

Australians imprisoned in China could be able to come home under new treaty agreements before parliament.

If the new treaty is passed, Australia will become the first country to have a prisoner transfer arrangement with China.

Under the treaty Australian citizens imprisoned in China will be able to serve out their sentences in Australia, provided the two countries and the individual involved all agree to the transfer.

Chinese nationals imprisoned in Australia will also be able to be transferred back to China under the same terms.

The Attorney-General's Department told the Treaties Committee that bringing prisoners home allows them to be closer to family, overcomes language barriers and improves the chance of rehabilitation.

There is also a chance for prisoners to have their sentences adapted before transfer so that their sentence more closely

matches the punishment they would have received in their home country.

The department gave the example of several Australian women who were serving 35 year sentences in Thailand for various offences, well above the 'life' sentence of 25 years in Australia.

They were able to be transferred back to Australia under the existing prisoner transfer arrangement, and by agreement their sentences were lowered to a similar level they would have received under Australian law.

The treaty will only apply to people convicted of offences that are considered criminal in both Australia and China, and any Australian facing the death penalty in China would need to have that sentence commuted before being eligible for transfer. •

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