

Speech: Japanese Prime Minister's visit is a chance to celebrate our friendship with like-minded nations: article by Jeremy Hunt

I sometimes find that foreign leaders are more aware of Britain's national strengths than we are at home.

So let me itemise a few of them.

The UK has the fifth biggest economy in the world, the third biggest overseas aid budget, the second largest military budget in NATO, and a world-class diplomatic network, including permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council.

Our friendships and alliances span the globe. Britain's role is to use these connections to be what I call an 'invisible chain', linking the democracies of the world to uphold the post-1945 order.

Today, the leader of a fellow democracy with the same objective will arrive in London.

Shinzo Abe, the Prime Minister of Japan, represents a nation closely connected to Britain.

Some countries are endowed with immense natural resources; others are located in the midst of great continents. Britain and Japan have neither of these advantages. We are both islands off the Eurasian landmass with modest natural resources and no option except to prosper through enterprise, innovation, and a global outlook.

Although separated by distance, Britain and Japan have built a remarkable economic partnership. As I write, about 1,000 Japanese companies are operating here, directly employing over 150,000 people and many thousands more in their supply chains.

In the last 4 decades, the ingenuity and expertise of Japanese management has helped transform vital sectors of the UK economy, from automotives to pharmaceuticals. All over Britain, people have benefited from the long-term, community-focused approach to business that is the hallmark of Japanese investment.

British business, meanwhile, is increasingly successful in the Japanese market. In 2017 alone, UK exports to Japan rose by over 12% to reach £13.5 billion.

I first visited the country in 1990 with the aim of learning Japanese. I was introduced to Japan and wonderfully looked after by Japanese families across

the country. For almost 2 years, I lived in Kyoto, Nagasaki, and Tokyo.

I learned Japanese with the aid of part-time jobs as a waiter in a French restaurant in Nagasaki and a coffee shop in Tokyo. I soon discovered the difference between the exceptionally polite form of Japanese we would use with customers and the informal conversation in the family home.

This experience left me with a great admiration for Japanese politeness, perfectionism, and determination.

At that time, Britain's relationship with Japan was focused on economic ties. More recently, our friendship has gone a step further. At a time when the world order that we both wish to preserve is under greater strain than for many decades, Britain and Japan are cooperating in new fields.

The Royal Air Force, the Royal Navy and the British Army have all been in Japan for joint exercises since 2016. Just last week, a British frigate, HMS Argyll, saw in the new year in Tokyo. We are working side by side to enforce United Nations sanctions on North Korea and help other countries against terrorism.

Britain and Japan share the same values of human rights and the rule of law, and the same determination to uphold those values around the world.

It is our friendship with other countries which share our outlook that is the vital building block for a confident post-Brexit future.