

News from Under the Southern Cross (Edition 57): Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting

16 February 2022

On 11 February, the Quad (Japan, Australia, the United States and India) Foreign Ministers' Meeting took place in Melbourne. Here is my report on that meeting.



The Quad (Japan, Australia, the United States and India) Foreign Ministers' Meeting

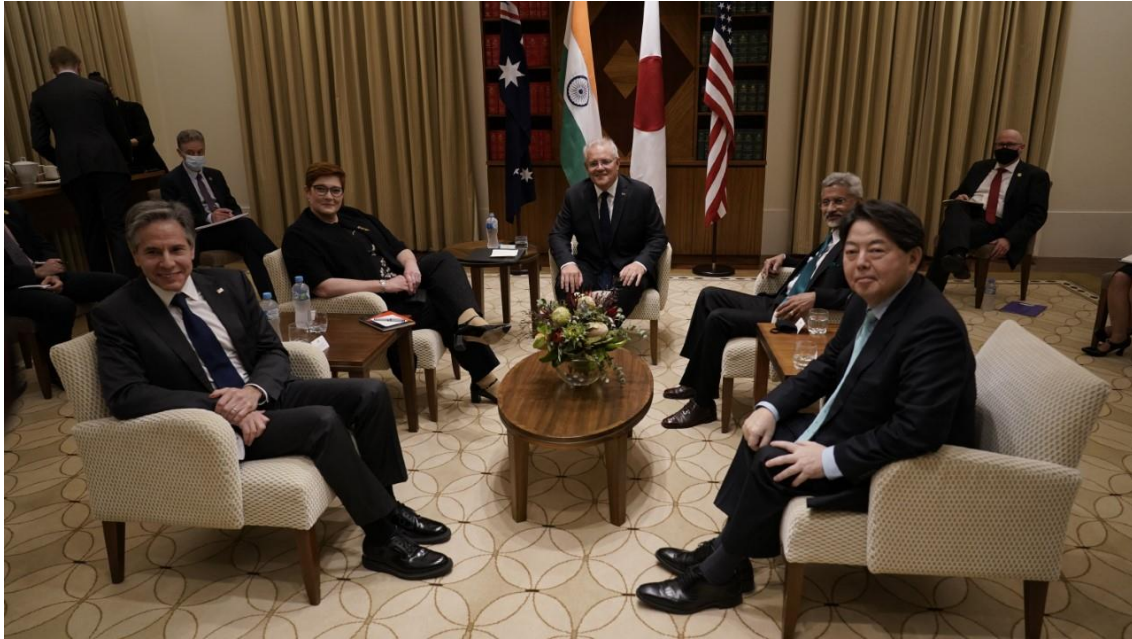
(Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan)

1. Congratulations, Australia!

Meetings of the so-called 'Quad', referring to the grouping of Japan, Australia, the United States and India, take place on a multitude of levels, including between Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers and senior officials. I mentioned more about the Quad's purpose and gave my report from the first face-to-face leaders' meeting in Washington last year in Edition 37 of News from Under the Southern Cross (available [here](#)).

Previously, there had already been three Quad Foreign Ministers' meetings, as well as eight senior official-level meetings. However, the significance of this fourth Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting lies in the fact that this is the first time Australia has been the host.

The Quad Ministers also paid a courtesy call to Prime Minister Scott Morrison. News of the meeting, alongside photos and video footage, was widespread in both the Japanese and Australian media.



The Quad Foreign Ministers pay a courtesy call on Prime Minister Morrison

(Photo: Adam Taylor, PMO)

2. “Australia is not walking alone”

It may not have looked like it, but behind the scenes, this was not an easy event to realise. Right now, all four countries are grappling omicron waves, tensions are growing over Ukraine, and the Japanese Government is in the middle of budget deliberations. This being said, it was a thoughtful consideration of the host for Japan that the meeting took place on a public holiday in Japan.

In this context, it seems even more impressive for Australia to have been able to bring together these foreign ministers and host such a meeting. This was indeed a Quad meeting at “a time when the power of diplomacy is called into question”, in the words of Foreign Minister HAYASHI. The proceedings, overseen by Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne, were conducted perfectly, at a good tempo, and with superb execution.

This meeting also marked the first time the four Ministers have released a joint statement (available [here](#)), clearly stating the common positions of the four countries, including their opposition to economic coercion.

Thus, Ministers from Japan, Australia, the United States and India, despite the schedules’ difficulties they each faced, gathered in Melbourne, joining their voices to promote a ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’. One Australian Government official expressed heartily that “we have

understood very clearly that Australia is not alone” - and I wholeheartedly agree.

3. Welcomed to a Sacred Site

In a move representative of local character, Minister Payne treated the Ministers to dinner at one of cricket’s sacred sites – the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). Used as a main venue for the Melbourne Olympics in 1956, this mammoth stadium can hold up to 100,000 people. To put it another way, it is as symbolic as the Japan National Stadium and Tokyo Dome combined.

Is it just me, or is it only natural to imagine you can hear the roar of the crowds packed into the endless stands, as I did standing on the well-manicured, sacred turf, so green it is easily mistaken for artificial grass?

By the way, just as Japan and the United States are so closely bound by a love of baseball, so too are Australia and India united by cricket.



The Melbourne Cricket Ground, where the Quad dinner was held.

(Photo: Embassy of Japan)

4. The Visit of Foreign Minister HAYASHI

Finding time amid countering the omicron variant and coping with budget deliberations, Japanese Foreign Minister HAYASHI Yoshimasa’s visit to Melbourne was a great encouragement to all of us working here in Australia.

The Minister's charter plane left Tokyo's Haneda Airport at nine-thirty in the evening on 10 February, arriving in Melbourne at nine-thirty the next morning. Upon arriving at the hotel, the Minister took both a rapid antigen and a PCR test, and was whisked away for a meeting with the Labor Party leadership. After that came bilateral talks with the other Foreign Ministers and various Quad events, making for a tightly-packed schedule before the Minister departed Melbourne for Honolulu at noon the next day. All in all, Minister HAYASHI's Melbourne visit spanned 27 carefully-planned hours.

A visit from the Foreign or Prime Minister is one of the great morale boosts to any embassy. The daily work of a diplomat is to build a strong foundation, which is bolstered through dignitary visits, to achieve concrete outcomes and reach even greater heights for the relationship. This is a fundamental aspect of diplomacy.

The visit of Foreign Minister HAYASHI was imbued with a special significance given Prime Minister KISHIDA's visit to Australia scheduled in the new year was unavoidably postponed. The Minister's visit was prepared by a team made up of staff from the Embassy and Consulates in Sydney and Melbourne. The energy with which these professional staff, displaying their skill and enthusiasm, left a deep impression on me.

5. On to the Quad Leaders' Summit

The Quad Ministers reaffirmed their desire to meet annually. Prime Minister KISHIDA has already announced that Japan will host the Quad Leaders' Summit in the first half of this year, and Friday's meeting served to clearly lay out the path to this next Leaders' meeting in Japan.

Japan and Australia, joining hands with the United States and India, can form a strong 'scrum' to realise a free and open Indo-Pacific. In witnessing this, my fatigue was quickly replaced by a comfortable sense of achievement.

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