

News From Under the Southern Cross (Edition 78):

Prime Minister Albanese's Visit to Japan

6 June 2022

(This is the translation of the original Japanese text, which was drafted on 31 May 2022)

From 23 to 25 May, newly sworn in Prime Minister Albanese visited Japan alongside new Foreign Minister Penny Wong. I also returned home to Japan in anticipation of this visit and played a role in their reception.



Quad Leaders' Meeting (photo courtesy of the Cabinet Public Affairs Office)

1. The Outcome of the Australian Federal Election

I previously wrote about the election in my [News From Under the Southern Cross \(Edition 72\)](#). The election was held on Saturday 21 May and currently votes are still being counted.

This is because, among those votes being counted, there are (1) votes cast at polling booths on 21 May, (2) pre-poll votes cast at polling booths before 21 May, and (3) postal votes cast by Australians living in regional areas and overseas, out of which the counting of postal votes in particular requires a lot of time.

According to the Australian Electoral Commission, as at 31 May, out of 151 seats in the House of Representatives, the Labor Party leads in a majority of 77 seats, the Coalition leads in 58 seats (the Liberal Party with 27, Queensland Liberal National Party with 21 and National Party with 10), the Greens lead in 4 seats and independents lead in 10 seats (so-called 'teal' independents focused on environment protection lead in 9 seats).

In any case, the Labor Party is set to hold an outright majority in the House of Representatives, which leads to the start of a Labor administration.

2. The First Major Task

It was the morning of Monday 23 May when Labor Party Leader Anthony Albanese was sworn in at Government House. Following this, without a moment's delay, the newly sworn in Prime Minister Albanese and Foreign Minister Wong set off in a military aircraft for Japan.



(Photo courtesy of Prime Minister Albanese's Twitter page, @AlboMP)

All this was to attend the second in-person Quad (Japan, Australia, India, United States) Leaders' Meeting in Tokyo, following on from the previous in-person meeting in Washington D.C. in September last year.

Of course, before the election, Japanese government officials (including myself) had explained the schedule for this meeting to those of the Coalition and Labor Party and encouraged them to participate. And we had received assurances from both sides that, if they were to win the election, they would definitely seek to attend this meeting.

Even so, departure was scheduled a mere two days after the election. The itinerary for this visit to Japan, coming just after a 6-week neck-and-neck election campaign, was considered 'nightmarish'. There is no doubt about the very strict schedule, which would have been tough both physically and mentally.

Therefore, it was a very emotional moment for me when, at 9 pm on Monday 23 May, I saw the majestic shape of the PM's special military aircraft landing at Tokyo's Haneda Airport, and Prime Minister Albanese emerging onto the stairs with a big wave, as State Minister for Foreign Affairs ODAWARA Kiyoshi and myself came to greet him. I said to him, "Welcome back, Prime Minister", since

I knew it was not his first visit to Japan, and his wide smile and deep nod left a strong impression on me.



(Photo courtesy of Prime Minister Albanese's Twitter page, @AlboMP)

3. The Quad Leaders' Meeting

As I mentioned earlier, the primary reason for this visit was to attend the Quad Leaders' Meeting. In the presence of experienced regular attendees, Prime Minister Modi, President Biden and Prime Minister KISHIDA, new Prime Minister Albanese's responses were watched closely.

Prime Minister Albanese's clear announcement at the beginning of his remarks that, 'we have had a change of government in Australia, but Australia's commitment to the Quad has not changed and will not change' was definitely a strong statement to satisfy representatives of each country.



(Photo courtesy of the Cabinet Public Affairs Office)

4. Japan-Australia Prime Ministers' Meeting

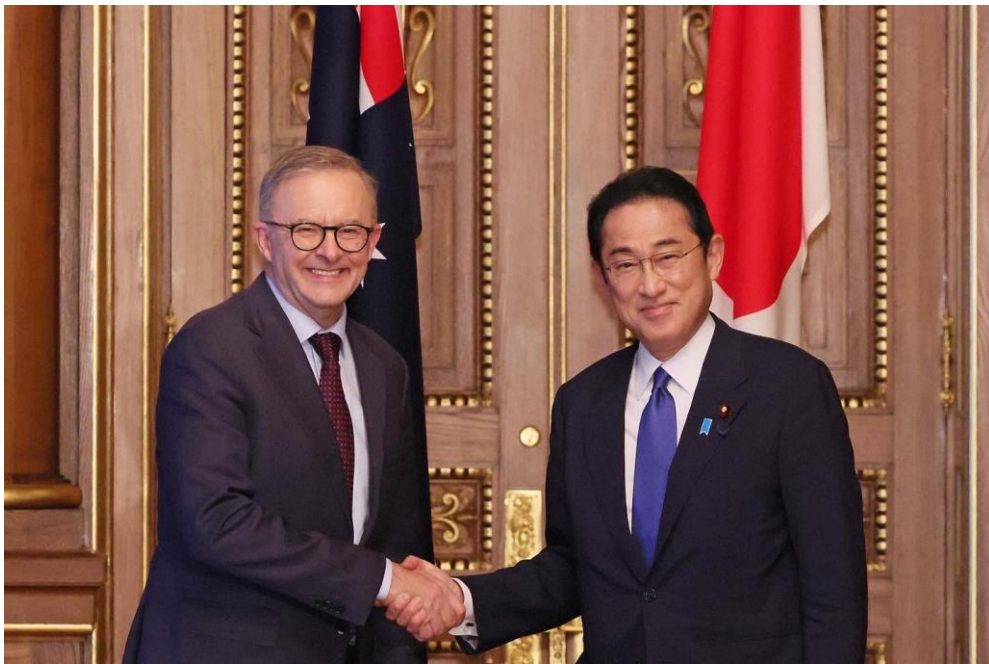
I was in attendance at the Japan-Australia Prime Ministers' Meeting that followed. For the first twenty minutes, the leaders met face-to-face accompanied only by their interpreters. After this, other staff were invited in, and the entire meeting lasted for around one hour.

Recognising that Russia's aggression against Ukraine is a pressing issue undermining the very foundations of the international order, the two leaders condemned it severely and concurred that similar incidents must never be allowed to happen in the Indo-Pacific region.

Additionally, the two leaders affirmed that Japan and Australia will continue to work closely together on the basis of three pillars:

- (1) Deepening cooperation in the areas of security/defence and economy (including the early entry into force of the Reciprocal Access Agreement signed by Japanese and Australian leaders in January, the release of a new Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, coordination in dealing with economic coercion, and cooperation on the Indo-Pacific

- Economic Framework (IPEF) launched the previous day);
- (2) Furthering coordination with allies and like-minded countries, including cooperation between Japan, Australia, India and the U.S., to contribute to peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region (such as Japan's support for AUKUS, and sharing our concerns about the security cooperation agreement between China and the Solomon Islands); and
 - (3) Cooperation on global issues such as climate change (including hydrogen and ammonia, reinforcement of energy supply chains, realising a world without nuclear weapons, and United Nations Security Council reform).



(Photo courtesy of the Cabinet Public Affairs Office)

What I found interesting was that Prime Minister Albanese himself showed a high level of interest in high-speed rail and mentioned *shinkansen* (Japanese bullet trains). Wouldn't it be marvellous if this were to become another aspect of Japan-Australia cooperation?

Not only this, but there was no doubt that both leaders were on the same wavelength when it came to the regional state of affairs, such as the situations in the East China Sea, South China Sea and North Korea. This was clearly symbolised by a thumbs-up from my old acquaintance – an Australian senior official sitting across the room from me – as the meeting ended.

5. The Send-Off

In the very early morning on Wednesday 25 May, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs MIYAKE Shingo and myself were at Haneda Airport to farewell the Australian delegation. Although the schedule had been extremely tight for the newly sworn in Prime Minister Albanese, I could tell from his expression that he felt he had accomplished what he needed to do.



It seems that, taking advantage of this Quad meeting in Japan, Prime Minister Albanese was able to build relationships not only with Prime Minister KISHIDA, but also with President Biden and Prime Minister Modi. From the perspective of the media coverage as well, we can safely say that the meeting was a great success.

Next year, Australia is scheduled to host the next Quad Leaders' Meeting. Furthermore, it is hoped that Prime Minister KISHIDA will visit Australia on the invitation of Prime Minister Albanese in the latter half of this year.

I am looking forward to seeing the Japan-Australia relationship reach new heights, made possible through frequent interactions such as these between leaders.

Shingo YAMAGAMI