

News From Under the Southern Cross (Edition 80):

The Japan-Australia Relationship outside the US-UK Prism

15 July 2022

Since my arrival in Australia, a prime motivation for my continuing to release my humble missives in the form of 'News From Under the Southern Cross' has been to "increase the presence of Australia in Japan" and "increase the presence of Japan in Australia". Put another way, I have been pondering the dilemma of how to break through the deeply entrenched habit of various entities in Japan to view Australia through the prism of either the US or UK.

1. A Visit to Australia by Representatives of the UK House of Commons Defence Committee

In the midst of this situation, there have been a number of recent developments where I have acutely felt how the times have changed.

A delegation of UK parliamentarians led by the Rt. Hon. John Spellar MP recently visited Canberra. The purpose of their visit was to examine anew the UK's security relationship with Australia following the establishment of AUKUS. Of course, the basis for this arrangement has without doubt been an awareness of the issue of how to respond to increased security threats in the Indo-Pacific region.

John is a mainstay of the UK Labour Party in the House of Commons, and whose wisdom I benefitted from while serving as the political minister at the Japanese Embassy to the UK about 10 years ago. While deeply knowledgeable about all things related to UK diplomacy and security, he has led the way in his understanding of the importance of the UK's relationship with Japan.

Following a request from John, I invited the UK parliamentary group to lunch at my Residence where we engaged in a frank exchange of views. The menu for the lunch consisted of breaded cutlets in curry sauce. When I extrapolated about how Japan had been responsible for the spread of curried rice derived from Indian curry, just as it had spread ramen culture based on Chinese noodles, these discreet

English gentlemen and ladies smiled demurely. Yet when I also told them that Japanese politicians often cram curry down their gullets when they are in a hurry, they all burst out laughing.



At the Residence with Group Leader Spellar and representatives of the UK House of Commons Defence Committee

2. Mike Green Arrives in Australia

In the same week, I used the occasion of the visit to Canberra by my old friend Dr. Mike Green, recently appointed as CEO of the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney, to invite him for an in-depth chat at the Tempura Counter in my Residence.



Discussions were robust and went for close to 4 hours

My relationship with Mike goes back to when I was Director of the Second North America Division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and he was serving as Senior Director for Asian Affairs in the White House. Thereafter, when I was Acting Director of the Japan Institute for International Affairs, he was serving as Deputy-Director-General of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington D.C. Under the strong leadership of JIIA President NOGAMI and the late SUNOHARA Tsuyoshi of the Nikkei Shimbun, we both collaborated on strengthening intellectual exchanges between Japan and the US via the “Japan-US Fuji Dialogue”.

Times change, and our involvement in strengthening trilateral ties among Japan, Australia and the US in this land of Australia shows just how the international situation has developed.

Mike’s statement that “Australia is America’s most intimate ally” and “Japan is America’s most important ally” are words of wisdom, spoken from the point of view of our fellow ally the United States.

3. The Promotion of Ambassador Adams

Some happy news that took place while all this was going on was the promotion

of Jan Adams, formerly Ambassador of Australia to Japan, to the position of Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, following the start of the Albanese Government.

With her experience as Ambassador to China before taking up her role in Japan, she's a diplomat with extraordinary knowledge of the situation in Northeast Asia and has become a pillar of the Australian diplomatic community. Her appointment as Secretary should be a very welcome development for Japan.

I am very much looking forward to working closely with Jan in Canberra once she takes up the Secretary position on 1 July to further develop the Japan-Australia relationship.



With Ambassador Adams at my Residence on June 1

4. The Japan-Australia Relationship on its Own Merits

When examining all that has taken place, the remarkable developments in the Japan-Australia relationship, while simultaneously capturing the attention of the intelligentsia in the US and UK, are underlined by the fact that Australia has applied A-level diplomatic human resources to the relationship.

This vividly illustrates the growing need to look squarely at the Japan-Australia relationship on its own merits and not through the prism of either the US or UK.

Unfortunately, of the major Japanese newspapers, the paper that maintains branch offices in Sydney and regularly covers the Japan-Australia relationship is limited to the Nikkei Shimbun alone. All the others have chosen to limit themselves by covering Australia from Jakarta or Singapore.

For many years, Japan's economic activity could not exist without the energy resources (coal, iron ore, LNG etc.) provided by Australia, and even now the reality is that more than half of the global profits accrued by one of Japan's major trading companies stem from their businesses in Australia. Australia is now one of the important pillars of the Quad, and from a security perspective is an important Special Strategic Partner of Japan. Yet is it too much to expect any shift to occur in Australia's place among Japan's media organisations?

It is for this very reason that I continue to be acutely aware of the need to convey the above facts to the people of Japan, even though I am humbly aware it might be a Sisyphean task.

5. The Start of an Uptick in People Visits

Visits by VIPs from the political, economic, and government worlds, starting with JMSDF Chief Admiral SAKAI, Fujitsu's Chief Executive TOKITA, ENEOS's Deputy CEO MIYADA, and INPEX CEO UEDA, are increasing now that travel restrictions to Australia have been lifted.

Speaking as an ambassador with experience of having served in the UK and US, I would like many people to visit Australia in order to gain first-hand knowledge of the importance of seeing Australia as it actually is and not through the prism of either the US or UK.

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