

Japan and Australia's new security deal amid China concerns



David Crowe

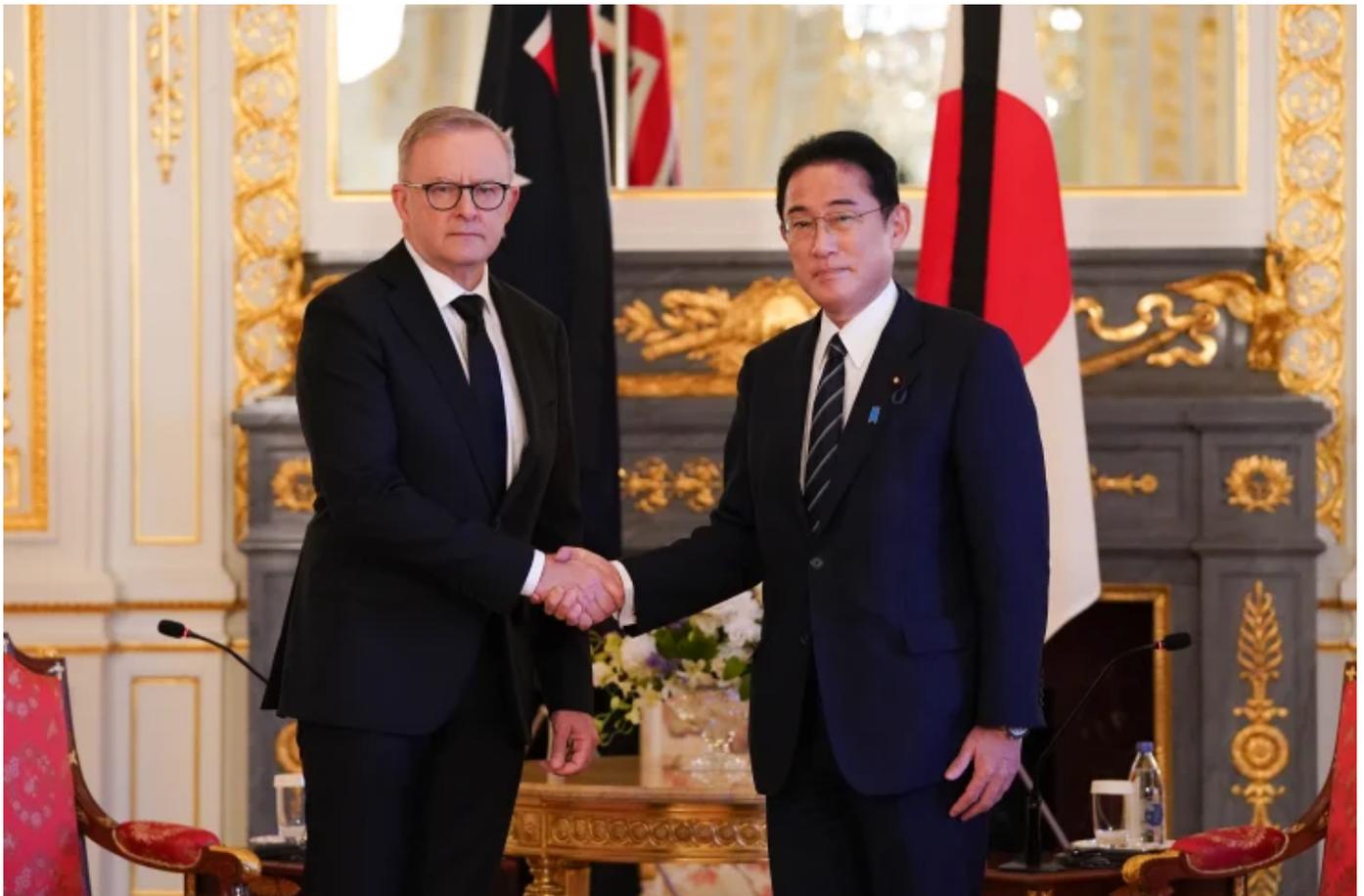
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KEY POINTS

- Japan and Australia will discuss a new security deal in Perth this weekend.
- The agreement comes at a time when China is building up its strength in the region.
- Australia says it will continue to supply energy to Japan, a key issue for the country given the Russian war in Ukraine.

A new security deal will clear the way for Australia and Japan to tighten defence co-operation and share more intelligence about emerging threats in response to growing concern about Chinese military operations in the region.

The Chinese operations in the South China Sea, where the superpower has built a network of bases on small islands and reefs over the past decade, are being named as a key reason for a new agreement to replace a defence declaration made between Australia and Japan in 2007.



Anthony Albanese will meet Japan Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Perth this weekend. CHRISTOPHER JUE

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese will meet Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida in Perth this Saturday to finalise the new declaration and discuss a “reciprocal access” agreement that will lead to more joint defence operations.

The Japanese ambassador to Australia, Shingo Yamagami, named the Chinese activities in the region as a reason for updating the security declaration, which was announced by prime ministers John Howard and Shinzo Abe in Tokyo in 2007.

Yamagami said China was making “unilateral attempts to change the status quo” in the East China Sea and the South China Sea as serious concerns for the security of the region.

“The peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is vital to the security of Japan.”

Shingo Yamagami, the Japanese ambassador to Australia

“The peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is not only vital to the security of Japan, but also to the stability of the international community,” he said.

“In light of this changing security environment, Japan and Australia intends to upgrade our security co-operation.

“A new security co-operation declaration, to be updated from the one signed in 2007, is intended to outline the direction for Japan-Australia security relations for the next decade.”

Kishida told reporters in Japan on Monday he expected the talks with Albanese, in the first visit to Australia by a Japanese leader since 2018, to cover security, energy and food.



John Howard hosted a visit to Australia in 2007 by then-Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. POOL/EPA

“We’ll co-operate to further our security and economic strategy,” he said, according to a Nikkei report on the new agreement.

Nikkei said the new declaration would emphasise a “free and open Indo-Pacific” and Japan would seek to work more closely with the Five Eyes, the group formed by Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States to collect and share intelligence.

Australia has kept up its diplomatic effort in the region this week, with Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles visiting Tonga and Papua New Guinea and Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong in the Cook Islands.

“Prime Minister Kishida and I will discuss ways to strengthen our co-operation and achieve our shared vision for a peaceful, stable, climate resilient and prosperous Indo-Pacific,” Albanese said in a statement.

Albanese added that Australia would remain a “steady and reliable supplier” of energy to Japan.

Energy security is a key issue for Kishida at a time when the Russian invasion of Ukraine has led to oil and gas shortages and price hikes that are hurting Japanese manufacturers and consumers.



Japan's ambassador to Australia, Shingo Yamagami, has warned that Queensland's increase in coal royalties could hamper Japanese investment.
ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN

With Albanese and federal cabinet ministers warning gas exporters to keep sending supplies to the domestic Australian market to keep prices down for local manufacturers and households, Japan is increasingly worried it could lose supplies under contracts its companies signed years ago.

Japanese investors have also complained to the Queensland government about its plans to increase royalties on coal miners, adding to the cost of energy shipped to Japan.

Yamagami met Queensland Treasurer Milton Dick on July 8 and Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk on July 27 to convey this.

The update to the security deal reflects sweeping changes to regional security since Howard and Abe announced the agreement in March 2007, the first time Japan had signed such an agreement with a country other than the US. Those talks also canvassed the idea of the "Quad" alliance between Australia, Japan, India and the US but this was dropped when Labor took power later that year.

Australia tightened defence ties with Japan when then-prime minister Tony Abbott met Abe in Tokyo in April 2014, although a deal on submarines later fell through. The two countries signed a Reciprocal Access Agreement in January this year to set up the legal framework for each to station troops in the other's territory.

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