

News From Under the Southern Cross (Edition 93) :

Prime Minister KISHIDA's Visit to Australia

27 October 2022

At last, the long-awaited prime ministerial visit became a reality. January's planned visit to Sydney was cancelled at the last moment due to Japan's worsening COVID situation. So in a sense, it's a case of 'second time's a charm'.



Prime Minister KISHIDA arriving in Australia

(Photo courtesy of the Prime Minister's Office of Japan website)

1. The significance of VIP visits

I may be stating the obvious, but I cannot over-emphasise the importance of reciprocal visits between leaders in diplomacy. Through these visits, not only do they put into practice the message that they regard the relationship between both countries as important and promote further friendship and goodwill, but the visit itself acts as a catalyst, shaping agreements on a variety of policy fronts and bringing forth new initiatives.

What is more, these visits raise the morale of those working behind the scenes. I can attest to this. Around 10 years ago, during the three years I was posted to London, not once did I have the opportunity to become involved in a prime ministerial visit to the United Kingdom. On the other hand, in the almost two years that I have spent in Australia since taking up my post, I have been involved in a prime ministerial visit, thus providing some poignant memories during my life as a diplomat.

2. An astonishing frequency of meetings

Recent progress of the Japan-Australia relationship becomes all the more clear when you examine the frequency of visits between our two leaders.

Prime Minister Albanese first met Prime Minister KISHIDA just after being sworn into office when he came to Japan for the Quad Leaders' Summit in May this year. Then, in September Prime Minister Albanese visited Japan again for former Prime Minister ABE's state funeral. This time saw Prime Minister KISHIDA visit Australia.



Welcome event for Prime Minister KISHIDA

(Photo courtesy of the Prime Minister's
Office of Japan website)



Both Prime Ministers pose for a commemorative photo
(Photo courtesy of the Prime Minister's Office of Japan
website)

With the addition of their meeting on the sidelines of the NATO Leaders' Summit, in the 5 months that Prime Minister Albanese has been in that role he has met with Prime Minister KISHIDA on an astonishing four occasions. Moreover, as Australia will host next year's Quad Leader's Summit, Prime Minister KISHIDA will again be visiting these shores.

In addition to the frequent meetings between our leaders, former Prime Minister ABE's state funeral was not only attended by Prime Minister Albanese, but by three former Australian prime ministers (John Howard, Tony Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull). Given such foundations, one can acutely feel the degree of closeness shared between Japan and Australia, an affinity that you rarely see in relations between other nations.

(You can watch my TV interview about Prime Minister KISHIDA's visit [here](#).)

3. Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation

In terms of Japan-Australia security and defence cooperation, in the years since 2007 when then-Prime Ministers ABE Shinzo and John Howard issued the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, Japan and Australia have been developing bilateral frameworks such as the Information Security Agreement, the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), and the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) which was signed in January this year. Using these as a base, our two countries have steadily engaged in concrete defence and security cooperation.

During Prime Minister KISHIDA's visit our leaders renewed this Joint Declaration. In order to reflect the vast changes in the strategic environment of the Indo-Pacific region that have taken place over the 15 years since 2007, this renewed declaration outlines the direction of our bilateral cooperation for the next decade.

In terms of concrete action, the leaders announced initiatives to enhance interoperability between the Japan Self-Defense Forces and the Australian Defence Force. Moreover, intelligence cooperation – which had not previously been included in the Joint Declaration – was this time given explicit mention. In

addition, the Declaration included the phrase ‘we will consult each other on contingencies that may affect our sovereignty and regional security interests, and consider measures in response’. This wording strikingly resembles that found within the ANZUS Treaty. All this constitutes a stepping-up in security and defence cooperation between Japan and Australia.

(You can read the Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation [here](#).)



At the signing ceremony for the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation

(Photo courtesy of the Prime Minister's Office of Japan website)

4. Energy and resource cooperation

The export of resources and energy in the form of coal, iron ore, and LNG from Australia to Japan, and the investment in those sectors from Japan to Australia, have underpinned the economic relationship between our two countries.

Perth is a place where businesses in the resources industry have continued to enjoy strong economic growth, and is a symbol of the history of Japan and Australia's partnership in the energy and resources fields in the postwar period. That Perth was chosen as the setting for the Japan-Australia Leaders' Meeting was a deeply significant development.

At the Leaders' Meeting, it was clearly reaffirmed that Australia's will continue to be a stable supplier of resources and a trusted destination for investment.

While continuing to cooperate on trade and investment in energy and resources, the two leaders confirmed that cooperation on decarbonisation, including in the area of hydrogen and ammonia which form an integral part of the Green Transformation (GX), is a new frontier for the Japan-Australia economic partnership.

Furthermore, the leaders agreed to further our critical minerals partnership, using the example of rare earth collaboration as a foundation, to build secure critical mineral supply chains.



During a visit to BHP Nickel West's Kwinana nickel refinery
(Photo courtesy of the Prime Minister's Office of Japan website)

5. A Free and Open Indo-Pacific

The leaders also confirmed that Japan and Australia now form the core of a partnership of like-minded countries to realise the vision of a Free and Open

Indo-Pacific.

At the Leaders' Meeting, there was an exchange of opinions about strengthening ties with South-East Asia and Pacific Island nations. Given concerns that we cannot allow today's Ukraine to become tomorrow's East Asia, both leaders agreed that Russia's intimidating remarks about the use of nuclear weapons are a grave threat to the peace and security of the international community and are absolutely unacceptable.

In this regard, I believe that Hiroshima-born Prime Minister KISHIDA's statement during the joint press announcement, which said "we must not allow the 77 years since atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki — the history of nuclear weapons not being used — to be made light of. Should nuclear weapons be used by some chance, their use would be a hostile act against all humanity. I stress once more that the international community cannot under any circumstances tolerate such behavior", was regarded as having profound significance.



The two Prime Ministers' Joint Press Announcement

(Photo courtesy of the Prime Minister's Office of Japan website))

6. Towards a new dimension

As demonstrated by the commentary above, you can see the steady and robust path our relationship is taking in each of these areas – security and defence cooperation, energy and resources cooperation, and realisation of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

Through Prime Minister KISHIDA's discussions in Perth with business leaders in the energy and resource fields and with Japanese residents in Australia, it became clear that people from all walks of life have great expectations for the future of our bilateral relationship. Indeed, this visit took our 'Special Strategic Partnership' to the next level.

YAMAGAMI Shingo