

Australian PM leads bipartisan delegation to funeral of Japanese militarist Abe

Mike Head**30 September 2022**

To underscore his Labor government's commitment to the escalating US preparations for war against China, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese took three of his Liberal-National predecessors to the controversial state funeral of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe this week.

Albanese placed great emphasis on bringing John Howard, Tony Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull to the funeral and a meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. All three, but Howard and Abbott especially, are notorious for backing US militarism and their involvement in the criminal US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

"I brought with me three former prime ministers here as a sign of respect... of the significance of the relationship between Australia and Japan," Albanese said in Tokyo, where he held talks with US Vice President Kamala Harris, another prominent funeral attendee.

In reality, it was an extraordinary display of bipartisanship, led by Albanese and the Labor Party, backing Washington's quest to re-assert hegemony over the Indo-Pacific—even if it means triggering a catastrophic war between nuclear powers.

Albanese organised this delegation as the Biden administration is increasingly provoking Beijing into a conflict over Taiwan. Washington is seeking to drag Beijing into a military quagmire, just as the US and NATO exploited Ukraine to provoke a war against Russia. As the largest non-NATO contributor of arms to Ukraine, the Labor government is backing both Eurasian war fronts.

Papua New Guinea Prime Minister James Marape, having just survived a general election in the former Australian colony, also travelled with Albanese to Tokyo. That points to the Albanese government's role in demanding that Pacific Island states align behind the Biden administration's moves against China.

Before the funeral service, Albanese said it was an honour to pay tribute to Abe, who spearheaded the drive to remilitarise Japan which invaded and occupied China during the 1930s. Albanese hailed Abe as the key architect of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), a de facto military alliance between the US, Japan, India and Australia against China. He told Kishida: "The Quad leaders' dialogue would not have occurred without his leadership."

As a further show of support for the Japanese militarist, Albanese ordered all Australian flags to be flown at half mast on September 27, the day of the funeral—a decree likewise issued for the British Queen.

Albanese's praise of Abe flew in the face of widespread public hostility in Japan to the funeral, especially in the working class. Abe oversaw an anti-Chinese and pro-business agenda of re-arming Japan, defying popular opposition and overriding democratic rights. That included record spending on the military and constitutional "reinterpretations" to justify going to war abroad for the first time since World War II, now alongside the US.

This was Albanese's second visit to Tokyo for talks with Japanese and US leaders. Immediately after the May 21 federal election, before it was even known if Labor had won a majority in parliament, he was prematurely sworn into office so he could fly to Japan for a Quad summit with Biden, Kishida and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

That rush was a statement by the Labor government of its intent to step up the frontline role of Australian imperialism in the war plans against China, already intensified under the detested Liberal-National government of Scott Morrison.

The Quad summit was a key feature of Biden's five-day trip to South Korea and Japan to display what the White House called a "powerful message" that, even as

Washington escalated the war against Russia in Ukraine, it was prepared to fight a war on two fronts, against both Russia and China.

Likewise, the Australian delegation to Abe's funeral had more than a symbolic character. According to the official readouts from their meeting, Albanese and Harris discussed the further development of the Quad and the AUKUS trilateral military partnership with Britain.

Under the fraudulent banner of ensuring "peace, security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific," they reportedly discussed plans to accelerate Australia's acquisition of long-range nuclear-powered submarines, designed to operate in and around Chinese waters.

While Albanese declined to provide any details, he declared: "AUKUS is important. And the relationship between Australia and the United States and the United Kingdom is, of course, a long one and a deep one. We'll continue to engage on those issues."

Abbott was more blatant. He used the occasion to call for nuclear-powered submarines to be delivered to Australia as soon as possible. Australia "can't get submarines quickly enough," he told Nine Media outlets.

"The quicker we can get either a [UK] Astute-based or a [US] Virginia-based Australian nuclear submarine, the better," Abbott insisted. "And in the meantime, if we can get a retired British or American submarine as an operational training base that would be well worth doing as well."

When the AUKUS pact was unveiled a year ago, the timeline announced for the submarines was the late 2030s or the 2040s. But the *Wall Street Journal* reported last weekend that the Biden administration was exploring options to deliver nuclear subs built in the US a decade ahead of that schedule.

This acceleration is expected to be made public early next year, when the next AUKUS and Quad summits are due to be held. Albanese will host the Quad meeting, the first to be convened in Australia.

Addressing the media before their meeting, Harris praised Albanese for "your leadership on many levels." She declared: "It was noted by all of us when you, right after being sworn in and inaugurated, I think immediately thereafter, probably with no time to celebrate, travelled to Tokyo to meet with the Quad."

Responding to Harris, Albanese thanked the US for its role in the region. Without naming China as the target, he stated: "We live in uncertain times, there is strategic competition. It is something we are very conscious of in the Pacific."

As he has done repeatedly, Albanese boasted that a Labor government sealed the US alliance during World War II. "[O]f course, the relationship between Australia and the United States has been extraordinarily significant," he said. "I'm proud of my party. We can trace the alliance back to 1941, [to] Prime Minister John Curtin, when Australia turned to the United States."

Like Harris, Albanese highlighted the significance of his dash to the Quad summit in May, saying he was "very pleased" to meet Biden. "He was somewhat surprised that under our system we can have an election on Saturday and I could arrive in Tokyo on Monday as the new prime minister. I assure you, some Australian citizens were surprised about the speed of that as well, but it showed how important it was."

That last remark is revealing. It betrays the nervousness in ruling circles over the public unease over Albanese's haste to meet Biden, and the underlying charge into combat with China.

Despite all the war drum beating by the Morrison government, trying to whip up anti-Chinese sentiment, now being escalated by the Labor government, there is deep concern among young people and working-class households over the lurch toward a third world war.

The endless US-led wars of the past 30 years have fuelled this concern. Moreover, workers are already opposing being forced by Labor and the trade unions to pay for a vast expansion in military spending and the impact of the Ukraine war, including through soaring inflation and austerity budget cuts, along with the continuing suppression of wages.

To avert another disastrous world war, these growing working-class struggles and the broad anti-war sentiment must be transformed into a conscious anti-war movement. This means a struggle against the Labor government and making common cause with workers globally, including in China, Japan, India and the US, against the root cause of war—the capitalist profit system.



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