

Japanese government boosts defence budget

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In a further step toward the country's remilitarisation, the Japanese cabinet approved an increased defence budget on Tuesday that will pave the way for a major boost for the country's Self-Defence Forces (SDF).

The military build-up is part of a strategic re-orientation of the Japanese armed forces to more aggressively confront China. Amid ongoing tensions with Beijing over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islets, the cabinet also approved several strategic documents, including the first-ever 10-year national security strategy. It explicitly blames China for "attempting to change the status quo by force" and raises "a concern" over "China's stance toward other countries."

Since coming to office last December, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has taken a far more confrontational stand toward China, even threatening to shoot down unmanned Chinese drones entering the airspace around the Senkakus. When China announced an Air Defence Identification Zone in the East China Sea that included the disputed islands, the US and Japan directly challenged Chinese authorities by repeatedly flying warplanes unannounced into the zone.

The strategic documents approved on Tuesday reflect Abe's campaign promises to build "a strong Japan" with "a strong military." He has sought not only to expand the military, but to unshackle it from the constraints of the country's post-war constitution. Under article 9, the so-called pacifist clause, Japan renounced war and "the threat or use of force as [a] means of settling international disputes."

Successive governments have stretched the clause beyond recognition. Japan built up its military under the guise of "self-defence" and over the past decade has dispatched units to support the US-led neo-colonial wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Abe is seeking to legitimise the formation of military alliances under the guise of "collective self-defence" and acts of aggression on the pretext of "pre-emptive self-

defence." His aim is to completely neutralise article 9 or abolish it altogether.

The Abe government is remilitarising under the Orwellian banner of "pro-active pacifism"—a phrase that featured no less than 10 times in the national security strategy approved on Tuesday. In reality, "pro-active pacifism" encapsulates the way in which imperialist governments around the world have always justified military build-up and war in the name of "peace."

The Abe government's increase to defence spending comes on top of that announced earlier this year, which was the first in a decade. The military allocation for the next five years, starting in April 2014, will be 24.7 trillion yen (\$US240 billion)—around 5 percent more than the previous five-year plan. While military personnel numbers will remain about the same, the extra money will help fund major equipment purchases.

The new military hardware is focussed on "island defence." Japan will add seven destroyers to its navy, including two with advanced Aegis guided-missile systems, bringing the total number of destroyers to 54. Six more submarines will be added, boosting the submarine fleet to 22. The air force will receive 28 F-35 stealth fighters, which are more advanced than the existing F-15 warplanes.

The armed forces will create an amphibious brigade, equipped with 52 new amphibious assault vehicles, able "to speedily land, recapture, and secure islands in case of invasions." Japan will also purchase 17 Osprey vertical take-off aircraft for rapid troop deployment. Maritime surveillance will be extended through the purchase of three unmanned drones. A unit of E-2C early warning aircraft will be stationed on Okinawa, in the south.

The expansion of the Japanese military is taking place with the encouragement of, and in the closest collaboration with, the Obama administration. A

lengthy joint statement from a meeting of Japanese and US defence and foreign ministers in October outlined Washington's own plans to boost its military presence in Japan as part of its preparations for conflict with China.

The Obama administration's "pivot to Asia," aimed at undermining China diplomatically and encircling it militarily, has led to a dramatic worsening of geopolitical tensions throughout the region. Japan is central to the Pentagon's war planning. Washington was instrumental in June 2010 in replacing Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, who it regarded as too accommodative to China. Hatoyama's Democratic Party replacements deliberately triggered diplomatic rows with China over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, opening the door for Abe and his right-wing Liberal Democratic Party to win last year's election.

Abe has not only expanded the military, but established a US-style National Security Council to centralise foreign and defence policy under his office, and pushed through a draconian secrecy law, vastly expanding the scope of state secrets and mandating heavy penalties for whistleblowers.

The strategic documents approved on Tuesday call for the cultivation of "love of country" in Japan and "expanding security education" in universities. Abe, a right-wing nationalist, is notorious for his dismissive attitude to the atrocities carried out by Japanese imperialism during the 1930s and 1940s in its colonial occupations in Asia. The proposed propaganda offensive is designed to counter the deep-seated hostility to militarism among working people in Japan. The secrecy law, which harks back to pre-war legislation, provoked widespread opposition and protests.

The Abe government's rapid turn to remilitarisation has provoked concerns of a different character in US ruling circles. A *New York Times* editorial on December 16 pointed to the anti-democratic character of the government's new secrecy law and its proposed constitutional changes, which delete any reference to democratic rights and hand the prime minister the power to declare a state of emergency and suspend ordinary law.

The editorial has nothing to do with any genuine concern for democracy in Japan. The *Times* has been one of the foremost apologists for the Obama

administration's blatant trampling on core legal and democratic rights. Rather, the comment reflects an anxiety that in encouraging the remilitarisation of Japan, the Obama administration's "pivot" is unleashing forces that the US cannot control. The editorial concluded with a warning: "Mr Abe's aim is to 'cast off the postwar regime.'" Critics in Japan warn that he is seeking to resurrect the pre-1945 state. It is a vision both anachronistic and dangerous."

The brutal suppression of the democratic rights of working people by Japan's militarist regime during the 1930s and 1940s went hand in hand with the attempt by Japanese imperialism to dominate Asia, which brought it into conflict with the US. While the Abe government is currently in close alliance with the US, the fear in Washington is that a resurgent Japan could start to once again prosecute its own economic and strategic interests at the expense of American imperialism.



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