

France, Japan form alliance targeting Chinese influence in Africa

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France and Japan agreed to cooperate on military and economic issues after Japan's foreign and defense ministers visited Paris for "two-plus-two" talks with their French counterparts on Thursday.

Speaking in Paris, Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida said, "The agreement will open up a new dimension for our cooperation on security and defense."

Paris and Tokyo agreed to set up a joint committee to discuss the development of military equipment and management of weapons exports. Japan is reportedly interested in particular in French military technology such as next-generation helicopters, submarine propulsion and underwater drones.

The "two-plus-two" talks follow an accord signed by Paris and Tokyo last June, when French President François Hollande officially visited Japan. During Hollande's visit, both countries agreed to deepen cooperation on nuclear reactor exports and to prepare to work together on the development of military equipment.

The current France-Japan talks focused largely on a stepped-up imperialist intervention in Africa, to destroy China's rising influence in the continent. Japan pledged to support ongoing French wars in two former French colonies, Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR).

Japan has contributed €735 million to the French military intervention in Mali. Paris expects that Tokyo will also provide financial assistance for France's war in CAR.

The new defense cooperation between Paris and Tokyo comes amid escalating military tensions between the major powers that, as is noted even in the bourgeois press, directly pose the risk of global war. (See: "Geo-political tensions raise spectre of 1914

Great War").

Japan and China are embroiled in a bitter dispute over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea. These tensions have been largely driven by the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia"—a US policy of forming strategic and military alliances with Japan, Australia, India and other regional powers to surround China and contain its rising economic influence.

Following the talks between French and Japanese ministers, a joint statement was issued apparently criticising China's declaration last year of an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) that covers the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. The statement emphasized the importance of ensuring the freedom of flight above the open sea and exclusive economic zones, as well as securing the safety of civilian aircraft.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said, "The tensions [between China and Japan] are a source of concern. We want this part of the world to find solutions to ease tensions."

Far from easing tensions, the accords between Paris and Tokyo are sharpening international conflicts and bringing into the open the great power calculations behind France's escalating wars in sub-Saharan Africa.

Fearing rising Chinese influence and declining French business competitiveness against Chinese firms in Africa, French imperialism has escalated military intervention in its former African colonies. In its wars in the Ivory Coast in 2011 and Central African Republic (CAR) in 2013, France targeted regimes that were developing closer ties with China.

In recent years, China has increased its trade with Africa, becoming the continent's single largest trading partner. It is a significant investor in Africa's resources sector and the biggest importer of oil and minerals from many African countries. It is also heavily involved in

building infrastructure, including highways, railways, and transit systems across Africa.

While it has focused on competing with China in Asia, Japan is also challenging Chinese influence in Africa. While Japan's foreign and defense ministers visited Paris, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe began his five-day tour of sub-Saharan Africa, the first such visit by a Japanese prime minister in eight years. Abe will visit the Ivory Coast, Ethiopia and Mozambique.

Reacting to Abe's visit to Africa, China's state-owned *China Daily* noted that the Japanese leader is seeking to "contain" China's influence in Africa.

The Franco-Japanese alignment against China is a reactionary agreement between two regimes seeking to step up militarist policies to ram through attacks on workers' social rights at home and on their great-power rivals abroad.

Officials in the administration of French President François Hollande have openly commented that they are modelling their African wars on the 1982 British Falkland Island war—in which British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher played the war card to boost support for her government and prepare for austerity measures, including the crushing of the 1984-5 miners strike. (See: "France seizes on murder of RFI journalists to intensify Mali war").

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is pressing ahead with moves to undermine remaining barriers to overseas war in Japan's post-war constitution. It recently issued a new national security strategy, compiled last year to strengthen its military independence and serve as a basis for Japan's foreign policy over the next ten years.

Abe's government is euphemistically presenting the stepping up of Japanese militarism as a policy of "proactive pacifism."

While these policies are initially directed at Chinese interests, there are numerous indications that the rising tensions in Asia and Africa will also provoke political clashes between the European powers.

It is noteworthy that Japanese officials—who stopped in France after holding talks in Spain focusing on economic cooperation in Latin America—did not stop in Europe's leading economy and most powerful state: Germany. There are definite indications of policy disagreements between Germany and France, the euro

zone's two largest economies, on the Senkaku/Diaoyu island dispute.

While France has aligned itself more directly behind the "pivot" and Japanese claims, the German government allowed Chinese premier Li Keqiang to issue a remarkable public claim to the islands last May while he was visiting Berlin.

Speaking in Potsdam, near Berlin, Li referred to the post-World War II Potsdam Proclamation on which China stakes its claim to the islands. He said, "The site of the Potsdam meeting is a place of historic significance. The Potsdam Proclamation clearly states that Japan must return China's territories of Northeast China, Taiwan and other islands after surrendering. The victory and international order had been achieved at the cost of sacrifices of tens of millions of lives."

For the European powers, including both Germany and France, the revival of Japanese militarism and the rising regional tensions stirred up by the US "pivot to Asia" are a lucrative opportunity to compete for military export markets.

Taking note of the "arms race in the Pacific," the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* commented that it "promises big business for the German defense industry." The magazine continued: "Next to the Gulf region, the Pacific is increasingly becoming one of the few global growth markets for defense firms. According to a 2013 report published by the Swedish research institute SIPRI, three of the world's five biggest arms importers are West Pacific states: China, South Korea and Singapore. For the German economy, the sale of large submarines is especially lucrative."



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