

Japanese PM embraces “collective self-defence”

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Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday took another major step toward the revival of Japanese militarism. In a televised speech, he backed a panel report, released on Wednesday, which justified a constitutional reinterpretation allowing Japan’s armed forces to engage in what is euphemistically described as “collective self-defence.”

Japan’s post-war constitution, in which Article 9 formally renounced war and declared that land, air and sea forces would never be maintained, has already been “reinterpreted” beyond recognition. The Japanese “self-defence” forces are large and well-equipped. Over the past two decades, they have been dispatched overseas to join so-called UN peacekeeping missions, as well as to participate in the US-led neo-colonial wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—none of which have anything to do with “self-defence.”

Now, in the name of “collective self-defence,” the Abe government, with the full backing of Washington, is seeking to end all constitutional restraints on Japan’s full involvement in US wars of aggression, and to forge new military alliances with countries such as Australia and the Philippines. Japan supplied naval refuelling vessels to support US operations in Afghanistan, and military engineers to help the occupation of Iraq. “Collective self-defence” would allow the deployment of a full range of combat capabilities in league with the US and other allies.

Like every government gearing up for war, Abe insisted his actions were to promote peace. “There is a misunderstanding that Japan will once again become a country that wages war, but I absolutely reject this,” he said. “I will protect the principle of pacifism in the constitution.” But, he declared, “no country can keep the peace on its own” and “the world has big expectations for Japan’s role,” referring in particular to

the US, Europe and South East Asia.

In reality, there is nothing defensive or peaceful about Japan’s remilitarisation. By legitimising “collective self-defence,” Abe is ensuring that Japan is a full partner in the Obama administration’s aggressive “pivot to Asia” and the US preparations for war against China.

US bases in Japan are already an integral component of the Pentagon’s AirSea Battle strategy, which envisages devastating air and missile attacks on the Chinese mainland to destroy its military capabilities. As far as Washington is concerned, it is intolerable that the US is committed to the full defence of Japan in the event of a war, but the Japanese armed forces would be prevented from participating in offensive operations against China.

In a bid to justify his move, Abe referred to the current standoffs in the South China Sea between China and Vietnam and the Philippines. Blaming China for the disputes, he declared: “In the South China Sea, even as we speak, confrontations between countries are continuing because of unilateral action backed by force.”

The chief responsibility for the rising tensions lies with Washington, which, as part of the “pivot,” has encouraged the Philippines and Vietnam to adopt a more aggressive stance in their territorial disputes with China. The same is true of Japan’s dispute with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea.

“Collective self-defence” is one aspect of Abe’s plans for remilitarisation. Since taking office in December 2012, he has boosted the military budget and re-oriented strategic policy to “island defence” in the country’s southern island chain adjacent to China. He has also established a US-style National Security Council and strengthened military collaboration with

the US. Further, Abe has sought to revive the traditions of Japanese militarism, through an ideological campaign designed to whitewash the war crimes of Japanese imperialism in the 1930s and 1940s.

Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera has already hinted that Japan could engage in pre-emptive war—in plain language, acts of military aggression. “When an intention to attack Japan is evident, and there are no other options, Japan is allowed under the law to carry out strikes against enemy targets,” he told Reuters in February last year.

Abe would like to go far further and rewrite the constitution, removing Article 9 in the process. To do so would provoke widespread opposition, however. Any constitutional amendment requires a two-thirds parliamentary majority, as well as ratification by a referendum.

As a result, Abe has chosen to revise the constitutional interpretation and cloak Japan’s military revival as “pro-active pacifism.” He faces deep-seated hostility to Japanese militarism in the working class, which experienced systematic police-state repression under the pre-war and World War II regime. His moves have also provoked opposition from countries such as China and South Korea that suffered under Japan’s brutal neo-colonial rule before and during the war.

Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying responded to Abe’s speech by declaring: “Asian countries, including China, and the international community, have full reason to be highly vigilant over Japan’s true intention.” The South Korean foreign ministry issued a statement calling on Japan to “uphold the spirit of Japan’s pacifist constitution.”

Within Japan, a poll in May by Japan’s national broadcaster, NHK, found that 41 percent were against the constitutional reinterpretation, while just 34 percent were in favour. Following the deployment of Japanese troops as part of the US occupation of Iraq, there were substantial protests demanding an end to the war and Japan’s involvement.

Yesterday evening, around 2,000 protesters rallied near the prime minister’s office in Tokyo against his plans for constitutional revision, chanting “Don’t destroy the constitution.” High school student Shu Fukui told the *Japan Times*: “Lifting the collective self-defence ban through changes in the constitutional interpretation is unacceptable. We may be sent to war.”

The widespread anti-war sentiment finds no expression within the political establishment. While opposition parties, including the Stalinist Communist Party, pay lip service to the pacifist clause of the constitution, all of them have lined up behind the Japan’s confrontation with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. As Abe prepares for war, these parties will seek to channel the widespread opposition to militarism into the dead-end of legal suits and parliamentary manoeuvres.



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