

Japanese government boosts military spending

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The Japanese government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced on Wednesday that his cabinet had approved a new budget that allocates ¥4.98 trillion (\$US42 billion) to military spending for 2015-2016, the largest amount in absolute Japanese yen terms since World War II, and an increase of two percent from last year.

Speaking at a military drill for airborne troops on Sunday, recently-appointed Defence Minister Gen Nakatani left no doubt that the increase is part of preparations for war with China.

“The situation around Japan is changing,” Nakatani declared. “The level of defence spending reflects the amount necessary to protect Japan’s air, sea and land, and guard the lives and property of our citizens.” Nakatani claimed that Chinese naval ships were appearing more often in Japanese waters and its fighter jets being flown “abnormally close” to Japanese planes.

The new budget will come into force in April if it is approved by the Diet, Japan’s bicameral parliament, later this month. The bill is likely to pass, given that the ruling coalition of Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party and its ally, the Komeito Party, hold a majority in both houses.

The military spending will include the purchase of six F-35 fighter jets from the United States, reportedly for \$148 million each, as well as five US-made Boeing V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft for \$100 million each. The funding will also be used to acquire another two destroyers equipped with Aegis anti-ballistic missile radar systems.

The Japanese military will obtain 20 P-1 maritime surveillance aircraft, at a total cost of just under \$3 billion, as well as 30 amphibious assault vehicles. The acquisitions also include an E-2D airborne early warning aircraft. Significantly, this will be specifically

deployed to the Nansei Shoto island region, which includes the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, over which Japan and China are locked in a tense territorial dispute.

According to an article published yesterday by Agence France Press (AFP), part of the defence spending will be put towards the government’s plans to obtain a fleet of “Global Hawk” unmanned drones over the next five years. Funding will also be directed to the development of a joint US-Japanese anti-missile defence shield, which is intended to facilitate a US nuclear pre-emptive first strike against China.

Defence Minister Nakatani’s claim, supported by the Obama administration and the international media, that the boosting of Japanese military capabilities is a defensive response to Chinese “aggression,” turns reality on its head. In fact, the Abe government is carrying out a remilitarisation of the country under the auspices of the US “pivot to Asia,” which is a diplomatic, economic and military offensive aimed at encircling China and preparing for war against it.

The “pivot” is not a response to Chinese “aggression,” but part of the drive by US imperialism to assert its hegemony in every part of the world, and prevent the emergence of any rivals which could pose an obstacle to its untrammelled influence.

The Obama administration has intervened into territorial disputes between China and its neighbours, including Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines, enflaming previously minor disputes into dangerous flashpoints. In 2012, backed by the Obama administration, the former Democratic Party government in Tokyo “nationalised” the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, a collection of rocky outcrops, by purchasing them from a private owner. The years since have witnessed a series of close encounters between Japanese and Chinese ships and aircraft that

could have led to armed clashes and triggered all-out war.

Last April, US President Obama affirmed that the United States would go to war with China in support of Japan's claim over the Senkakus. At the same time, Japan has been involved in repeated military exercises in the region alongside other US allies, particularly Australia and India, which would also be drawn into what could rapidly escalate into a nuclear conflagration.

Under Shinzo Abe, Japanese imperialism is rapidly casting aside the post World War II restrictions on its ability to conduct military operations and is now reasserting its own independent geopolitical ambitions.

Last June, Abe announced that his government had "reinterpreted" the pacifist clause of the country's constitution, which forbids Japan from engaging in any military actions apart from national self-defence. Abe asserted the notion of "collective self-defence," claiming that Japan could join a war involving the US, anywhere in the world, in order to assist its ally if it was under attack.

Abe did not attempt to openly revise the constitution, as that would galvanise the overwhelming opposition to militarism within the Japanese population, which has not forgotten the terrible crimes committed across Asia by Japanese imperialism, or the suffering endured by the Japanese people.

The Abe government is waging a propaganda campaign to overcome this sentiment, seeking to promote Japanese nationalism while whitewashing the historical record of the crimes of the Japanese armed forces. Last February, an Abe appointee declared that the 1937 Rape of Nanking, in which up to 300,000 Chinese civilians were massacred, never happened.

Having successfully held onto power in snap elections last December, Abe is intensifying his militarist agenda. He is now seeking to enact legislation which would allow the government to unilaterally authorise military operations alongside non-US allies and United Nations operations as well, without having to seek the approval of the parliament. At present, separate legislation must be passed for any external military deployments, as was the case for Japan's participation in the US-led occupation of Iraq and war in Afghanistan.

The *Japan Times* noted on January 11: "The proposed replacement [law], which would be able to be

applied to any international conflict, would allow the SDF to help Australian forces, for example, in the event of a military emergency on the Korean peninsula."

The international financial press has largely criticised the Abe government's budget, which includes a total projected spending of ¥96 trillion (\$US824 billion), for failing to carry out sufficiently deep austerity spending cuts to social services.

The *Financial Times* declared: "People familiar with the finance ministry said much more stringent and politically difficult cuts would be needed in the years ahead. Mr Abe's government has pledged to produce a long-term fiscal consolidation plan—perhaps involving big reductions in social security spending—by the summer."

The government claims its budget will allow it to reduce the total deficit to 3.3 percent of GDP, down from 6.6 percent in 2010. Commentators have noted the dubious character of these calculations. It does not include the cost of servicing Japan's staggering public debt of more than \$US11 trillion or 240 percent of GDP. Moreover, the sale of government bonds, which are being purchased by the Bank of Japan as part of its program of quantitative easing, is projected to account for close to 40 percent of total revenue.

At the same time, the government is predicting high tax revenue from corporations whose profits have been boosted by the government's monetary stimulus measures. While these measures have temporarily increased profits, real wages for the working class have continued to stagnate.

Under conditions of deepening global economic breakdown, the effective bankruptcy of the Japanese state will compel Abe's government to impose deeper austerity cutbacks to social services, pensions and the broader conditions of the working class. A major factor in the turn to militarism is the attempt by the ruling class to divert the immense class antagonisms building up within Japanese society outward and into reactionary nationalist channels.



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