

Japan pushes forward with plans for overseas intelligence agency

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On the pretext of responding to the recent killings of two Japanese citizens in the Middle East by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Japanese government is stepping up its plans to create an overseas intelligence body similar to the US CIA or British MI6.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stated in early February: “It is vital to strengthen the government’s intelligence functions and gather more accurate, prompt information that will be reflected in the state’s strategic decision-making.”

The Abe government is politically exploiting the brutal slayings of Kenji Goto and Haruna Yukawa by ISIS in January, claiming that more sophisticated intelligence gathering is necessary to protect Japanese lives abroad.

In reality, the creation of such an agency is part of the government’s agenda of remilitarization. Japan’s ruling elite views an overseas intelligence agency as vital to becoming a “normal country,” or in other words, allowing Japan to end the constraints on the use of its military and intelligence agencies to pursue its imperialist interests.

Following World War II, the US dismantled the Japanese intelligence apparatus, which included its military intelligence and the Kempeitai—secret police—as part of its agenda to eliminate Japan as a threat to Washington’s hegemony. Today, the Obama administration is actively encouraging Tokyo to remilitarize as part of Washington’s “pivot to Asia,” designed to isolate and undermine China.

Japan’s intelligence operations are currently scattered among several agencies, including the Cabinet Intelligence Research Office (Naicho), the National Police Agency, the Public Security Intelligence Agency at the Justice Ministry, and the Defense Ministry’s Defense Intelligence Headquarters.

Lawmaker Takeshi Iwaya from Abe’s ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is leading a team of officials who will meet with US and British officials to lay the groundwork for a unified Japanese intelligence agency. According to Iwaya, legislation will be drafted in the fall and possibly be enacted the following summer.

Abe’s government has already set up a US-style National Security Council (NSC) as well as enacted a sweeping state secret law. The NSC allows the prime minister to exercise control over foreign and defense policy, enhancing cooperation with the United States, while the state secret law hides these machinations from the public’s view. Along with the creation of the NSC, Naicho was also reorganized in preparation for the establishment of a centralized intelligence organization.

Last summer, Abe’s cabinet approved a reinterpretation of Japan’s constitution that allows for “collective self-defense.” In other words, it permits Japan to take part in wars of aggression overseas as long as an ally, such as the United States, or partner claimed to be under threat. The government is now preparing a collection of new laws that would codify this “reinterpretation.”

If passed, this “collective self-defense” legislation, slated to be presented to the Diet (Japan’s parliament) in the spring, would immediately allow Japan to take part in activities such as mine sweeping in the Persian Gulf in aid of US operations in the Middle East. It would also enable Abe’s cabinet to dispatch the Self-Defense Forces, the official name of the Japanese military, more quickly while clamping down on opposition more easily at home.

Abe has also begun a campaign to change Japan’s post-war constitution, including Article 9, which formally renounced war and declared that land, air and

sea forces would never be maintained.

However, there is widespread opposition to the Abe government's plans to change the constitution and to remilitarization. The *Yomiuri Shimbun* showed that in annual surveys between 2004 and 2014 opposition to altering the constitution rose from 46 percent to 60 percent, while approval fell from 44 percent to 30 percent.

By exploiting the ISIS killings, the Abe government is preying on people's fears while running roughshod over their objections to war. Iwaya stated: "It was a fact that we didn't have enough presence in the Middle East and had to rely mainly on foreign countries beginning with Jordan and Turkey... So the public has begun to think they want information gathering and analysis to be done properly."

However, even in the direct aftermath of the hostage crisis, a Jiji Press poll in February found that 53 percent of people were opposed to Japan's involvement in overseas military operations as proposed in the "collective self-defense" legislation. Kanta Shimura, an architecture student, told the media outlet: "I am worried that we might one day get dragged into someone else's war. I'm concerned about Japan always following the United States."

The ISIS slayings are in fact the excuse for a move that has been in preparation for several years. A US cable from October 2008 revealed by WikiLeaks showed that the LDP governments of Yasuo Fukuda (2007–2008) and Taro Aso (2008–2009) were working to develop an overseas intelligence branch under Naicho, with the support of the United States.

The US embassy in Tokyo reported to Washington: "The decision has been made to go very slowly with this process as the Japanese realize that they lack knowledge, experience, and assets/officers. A training process for new personnel will be started soon."

In a conversation with then US State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research chief Randall Fort, Naicho director Hideshi Mitani said the main priority was a "human intelligence collection capability." The purpose of such an agency was to gather intelligence on "China and North Korea, as well as on collecting intelligence information to prevent terrorist attacks," Toshio Yanagi, then head of Japan's internal security at the Public Security Information Agency, told the US intelligence official.

As these cables document, the establishment of a new Japanese overseas intelligence agency would primarily be aimed at China and its ally North Korea, increasing tensions in a region that has already been transformed into a powder keg.



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